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THE

NATURE AND DESIGN

OF A

CHRISTIAN CHURCH.

BY THE LATE REV. JOSEPH LATHROP, D. D.
OF WEST SPRINGFIELD, MASS.

FOURTH EDITION,

WITH

REMARKS ON THE LORD'S SUPPER,

BY ANOTHER HAND.

BOSTON,
SAMUEL G. SIMPKINS.
1832.

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ADVERTISEMENT.

Dr Joseph Lathrop, the writer of the two following sermons *on the nature and design of a Christian church*, was one of the most eminent ministers of his day, and had the singular good fortune to enjoy the respect and confidence of Christians of various denominations. He is commonly ranked among *orthodox* divines; although, it is believed, that his writings are in as good repute, and his character as highly appreciated among *liberal* Christians, as among any other class of persons whatever. And, indeed, it would appear from the general character of his printed sermons, as well as from the very interesting memoir he has left us of his life, that, whatever name he may bear, he was a man of a truly catholic and liberal spirit, as far removed as possible from every thing narrow, exclusive, or sectarian. In a word, he belonged to the class of old-fashioned divines—alas! that the class should have become almost extinct in New England—who were neither of

Paul nor of Apollos, but of Christ. What he would have been, had he fallen on our evil times, and been compelled as it were to take sides, it is useless to conjecture. But it is difficult to conceive how such a man as Dr L. should become an exclusionist or a bigot under any circumstances whatever. However this may be, he was universally honored and beloved while living, and his praise is still in all our churches.

He was born at Norwich in Connecticut, in 1731, and graduated at Yale College in 1754. Having pursued his professional studies for some time under the direction of the Rev. Robert Breck of Springfield, he commenced preaching as a candidate for the ministry and soon received an invitation to settle in the neighboring parish of West Springfield, where he received ordination in August, 1756. Here he remained till the day of his death, a period of more than sixtyfour years, the faithful, honored, and beloved pastor. He died on the last day of the year 1820, in the 90th year of his age.

The writings of Dr L., published during his life, procured for him a high reputation as a scholar and divine. His printed sermons, exclusive of the volume published since his death, amount to more than two hundred, and are

contained in six octavo volumes. They have had a wide circulation, and may be regarded as among the most popular and useful discourses furnished by the American pulpit.

His two sermons 'on the nature and design of a Christian church,' which are here republished, have already passed through several editions and are now out of print. They will be found, it is believed, to contain rational and scriptural views of a subject, which, to many minds, is still involved in mystery, or very imperfectly understood; and their republication, it is hoped, will do something to supply the wants of the religious community at the present time.

There may be little of originality, and nothing peculiarly striking in the views themselves, or in the form in which they are presented by our author. But they may not, on that account, be the less valuable. They are the views of a sound and able divine, of one, too, who was not a party man, and whose mind appears to have been singularly free from every sectarian bias. To some this may be no slight recommendation of the work.

In further illustration of his views in relation to this subject, the following beautiful and affecting passage may be quoted from the me-

moir of his life, referred to above. The occasion alluded to was this. An interesting youth belonging to his society, after a few days severe suffering, had yielded up his spirit in the calm hope of a blessed immortality. On the Lord's day, preceding his death, a number of his young friends having called to see him, he gave them much good counsel; and, among other things, made it his particular request that they would occasionally visit the spot where his body should be laid. 'Perhaps,' said he, 'a sight of the clods which cover it will remind you of my advice, and awaken your resolutions to follow it.'

To the father of the youth, who had just given an account of his son's conversation, Dr L. replied:

'I am exceedingly pleased with your son's counsel to the young, and there is one part of it which strikes me with peculiar force. He advised them now and then to visit his grave, that they might better remember and more deeply feel his dying exhortation. This is so similar to the dying command of Christ that I cannot forbear to remark to you the similitude. The Saviour, when he was on earth, spent the greater part of his ministry in giving good instructions to those who would hear him. When

the time of his death drew near, his instructions were more frequent and affectionate; and he urged them by the solemn circumstances of his approaching death. He well knew that good counsels were easily forgotten; he therefore recommended the frequent remembrance of his death, as a mean to impress his words more indelibly on the heart. The place of his burial could not be visited by his disciples in all ages, and in all parts of the world; and, if it could, yet his body would not be there; for it was soon to rise. He therefore instituted a particular ordinance, as a representation and memorial of his death; and commanded that this should be frequently observed in remembrance of him, to show forth his death, till his second coming. The end for which he appointed this ordinance was, that we might remember him, and the words which he spake—remember his death and the benefits which it procured.

Now, Sir, you certainly think that your son gave his companions good advice, when he recommended their visiting his tomb, that they might revive a remembrance of his instructions; and you wish they would comply with it. And ought not we much rather to regard the dying command of the Saviour, who has

required you and me and all to come to the place where he is set forth as crucified for us; and there to awaken the recollection of his instructions and our resolution to obey them? Their attention to your son's counsel is expedient; our obedience to the Saviour's command is indispensable.'

This happy application of the son's dying request was not lost on the father. 'At the next communion,' we are told, 'he was present as an affectionate spectator; and, at the next following, he was present as a devout communicant.'

On the Sabbath that followed the young man's death, Dr. L. addressed a discourse to the youth of his congregation, in which he employed the same argument to persuade them to observe the ordinance of the Lord's Supper.

Of the duty of young persons in relation to this ordinance Dr. L. has given his views more fully in a discourse entitled, '*Youth invited to the Lord's Supper*,' contained in the fifth volume of his printed sermons. Some extracts from this discourse will be found in the following pages. It will be seen, from these extracts, that in his view, the Lord's Supper is an ordinance peculiarly suited to those who still retain the warm affections of youth; and

that he was earnest even to importunity to persuade such to join themselves to the Lord in an everlasting covenant. He even goes so far as to maintain that the children of believing parents are actually *within the church of God*, and *that when they have competency of knowledge, should be invited to her actual communion.* Such he believes to have been the practice of Christians in the apostolic age.

'How beautiful,' he exclaims, 'is the church, in which our sons are as plants grown up in their youth, and our daughters as corner stones, polished after the similitude of a palace! How pleasing the prospect, when we see children devoting themselves to God, taking hold of his covenant, and youths walking in his ways and encouraging one another in his service! we then anticipate the virtue and felicity of many generations, and promise ourselves, that we shall see the good of Jerusalem all the days of our life; and that our children's children will see the church in peace.'

The remainder of the volume has been prepared by another hand; and the whole, it is hoped, will be found to accord with the leading object of the society in whose name it appears, and will aid in the *promotion of christian knowledge, piety, and charity.*

THE

NATURE AND DESIGN

OF A

CHRISTIAN CHURCH.

I. CORIN I. 2.

Unto the church of God, which is at Corinth; to them who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, with all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours.

That we may better understand the apostle's idea of a church of God, we must bear in mind that the Corinthians, before the gospel was preached among them, were 'gentiles carried away unto dumb idols, even as they were led.' Those of them who received the doctrine preached by the apostles, renounced the idolatrous forms and places of worship, and united together to worship God through Jesus Christ, in the manner which the gospel prescribes. These

are called *a church*, which in the original language, properly signifies a select company, or an assembly called forth from the rest of mankind for some particular purpose, more especially for the purpose of religious worship. The church in Corinth was that number of persons, who had come out from among their idolatrous fellow citizens for the true worship of God in Christ.

The apostle describes them, 'as sanctified in Christ Jesus, and called to be saints.' We cannot suppose, that by this description he intended to represent all the members of the Corinthian church to be gracious, godly persons. Many passages, in this and his second epistle to them, import that he thought otherwise; but these phrases rather signify, that they had been called out of the world, and separated from others, that they might be a peculiar people to God. 'They were called to be holy.' The words, sanctified, saints, and holy, applied to bodies of men, are usually to be taken in the same general sense, as Christians, disciples, and brethren; to express their visible relation

and professed character, rather than a certain judgment concerning their habitual temper. The sabbath, the temple, its utensils, and the ground on which it stood, are called holy, and said to be sanctified, because they were separated from a common to a sacred use. The nation of the Jews, in which, at its best state, were great numbers of ungodly men, is called holy, as being separated from other nations, for the service of the true God. Moses says, 'Ye are a holy people to the Lord, a peculiar treasure, a kingdom of priests.' So the Christian church is called 'a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people.' The word saints, in many places, stands opposed, not to unsound Christians, but to the heathen world, particularly in the passages which speak of persecution against the saints, of ministering to the saints, and of distributing to the necessities of the saints; and in that remarkable passage which denominates the children of a believer holy, in distinction from the children of the unbelieving, who are called unclean.

The apostle farther describes the Corinthian church, as consisting of those who 'call on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ;' who own him to be their Lord and Saviour, profess to hope for salvation through him and worship God in his name.

He directs his epistle 'to all, who, in every place, call on the name of Christ Jesus the Lord, both theirs and ours.' In this address, he signifies, that there is a sacred relation subsisting among all Christians in every place, and that, as they profess subjection to one common Lord, so they ought to maintain communion one with another.

The words of our text will naturally lead us to consider,

I. The nature of a church of God.

II. The end of its institution.

III. The relation which children bear to it.

IV. The qualifications requisite for admission into it. And,

V. The fellowship, which ought to subsist among its members.

I. We are to consider the nature of a church of God.

Its general nature, as a select company, called forth from the world, for the worship and service of God, we have already stated in the opening of our text. Some further illustrations, however, will be necessary.

The church is sometimes distinguished into the invisible and the visible church. By the invisible church, is intended the whole number of real saints in all places and ages; the whole family in heaven and earth; those whom Christ will gather together in one body in heaven. This is that 'mount Zion, the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem,' which consists of an innumerable company of angels, the spirits of just men made perfect, and the general assembly and church of the first born, who were enrolled in heaven. By the visible church are meant all those who have been visibly dedicated to God in Christ, and have not, by infidelity, heresy, or scandal, cut themselves off from the society of Christians; or, in the words of our apostle, 'all who, in every place, call on the name of Jesus Christ our Lord.'

The visible church is again distinguished into the catholic or general church, and into local or particular churches. The word is often used to denote all the professed people of God in all nations and ages. In this large sense it is to be understood, when Christ is said to be made head of the church, and the church is described as subject to him. The whole Jewish nation, which was chosen of God, to be a peculiar people to himself, is called *the church*. It is said of Moses, 'he was in the church in the wilderness.'

When this people, by their great and increasing corruption, were ripening apace for destruction, God sent his own Son, the promised Redeemer, to rescue from ruin his sinking church, and place it on a larger and surer establishment. By his teaching, and the ministry of his apostles, who were trained up under his immediate discipline, a considerable number of subjects were gained over to his kingdom, while he was on earth. Just before his ascension, he gave these apostles a commission to go forth, and spread

his doctrine, and collect subjects among all nations. His church, which before stood on the foundation of the prophets, now stands on the foundation of the apostles also, he himself being the corner stone, in which both parts of the foundation meet and are united. The church was formerly limited to one nation, but now it is indiscriminately extended to all. In the city of Jerusalem there were many, who, before the descent of the Holy Ghost, consorted for the worship of God in Christ. To these were soon added multitudes, who continued in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread and in prayers. They were called *the church*. After the gospel was spread to such an extent, that it was no longer possible for all the believers to attend the worship of God in the same place, particular religious societies, in divers places, were formed for the convenience of worship, each of which had the name of *a church*.

These societies of Christians, united in different places for mutual edification in the joint worship of God, are what we mean by

particular churches, in distinction from the catholic or universal church. Thus the Christians in Corinth, those in Galatia, those in Ephesus, those in Thessalonica, are called *a church*. But as all these particular churches received the same gospel, maintained the same form of worship, and professed subjection to the same Lord, so they are often considered as *one* church. Though we read of many churches, yet these are only so many different parts of the same universal church. They are members of the same great body, apartments of the same house, provinces of the same empire. With regard to their several jurisdictions and places of worship, they are distinct; but yet one in the main, as they call on the same Jesus, their common Saviour and Lord.

As there was in the apostolic times, so there is now, frequent occasion for new churches to be formed. But from the preceding observations, it appears, that whenever a new church is erected, careful regard should be had to her communion with other churches, as well as to the communion of

her own members among themselves; otherwise the body of Christ is divided, and the bond of peace is broken.

Among the members of every particular church, there is always supposed to be a solemn convenant and agreement to walk together in the commands and ordinances of Christ, to watch over one another in meekness and love, and to be fellow-helpers to the kingdom of God. The church in Corinth is said to 'come together into one place.' The church in Jerusalem is cautioned 'not to forsake the assembling of themselves together;' and required, to 'exhort one another, and to consider one another, that they may provoke to love and to good works.' And Christians are enjoined to 'be subject one to another.'

The convenant between the members of a particular church, to walk together in the ordinances of Christ, is of sacred obligation; and when any of them have occasion to remove to another church, they should do it in a manner consistent with Christian order, peace and communion. When a number

of Christians unite in a new church, still they must consider themselves as members of the general body, and seek not merely their own profit but the profit of many.

II. The end for which a church was instituted, and the purpose for which we are called into it, is what we proposed, in the second place, to consider.

Christ's kingdom is not of this world. As the nature, so the design of it is purely spiritual. It is, that in the enjoyment of suitable means we may be trained up in knowledge and holiness; and thus formed to a meetness for future glory.

It is said, 'the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.' This is not to be understood as importing, that all who joined themselves to the church were finally saved. There were in that, as there are in all ages, many who call Christ their Lord, and eat and drink in his presence, but still are workers of iniquity. But they are called the saved, because they are admitted to the offers and means of salvation. In this sense also, baptism is said to save us; not as con-

veying an immediate right to salvation, but as being the appointed way of introduction into the visible church, where the means of salvation are afforded. In the same sense we are to understand those passages, where salvation is promised to whole families on the faith of the head. Not that his faith entitles them to eternal life, but that it brings them into the visible church, and to the enjoyment of the means of salvation. 'Noah, by faith, prepared an ark to the saving of his house; the like figure whereunto, even baptism doth now save us.'

As without holiness, none can be admitted into God's heavenly kingdom, 'Christ gave himself for the church, that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, that he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish.' The church, in our text, is described, as consisting of those 'who are called to be holy.' Christ has set in his church, teachers for her edification, 'that we might all come in the unity

of faith and knowledge, to the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ; and professing the truth in love, might grow up into him in all things.'

Love is a most important branch of gospel holiness. Christians 'are chosen in Christ, that they might be holy and without blame before him in love; and might purify their souls in obeying the truth, through the spirit, unto unfeigned love of the brethren.' Christ has, therefore, appointed that his disciples, dwelling together in social connection and maintaining fellowship in religious duties, should increase and abound in love one toward another, and toward all men. They are directed to 'forbear one another in love, and keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace, because there is one body,' or church, of which they are all members, 'and one spirit, one Lord, one faith, and one baptism.' In order to their enjoying the grace of God, for their increase and edification, they must, like the parts of a building, be 'fitly framed into each other, and be builded together for an habitation of God through the spirit.'

Having illustrated the nature and design of a church of God, we will now attend to the next proposed inquiry.

III. What relation children bear to the church?

This will be necessary, previously to our stating the qualifications of adult proselytes.

When first the apostles went forth to preach the gospel, and erect churches in the world, mankind in general were in a state of heathenism, or judaism; and, either had not heard of the gospel, or did not believe it to be divine. From among these, were they to make proselytes to Christianity.

What they required of the proselytes, whom they admitted into the church of God, was a professed belief, that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God. This profession of faith in Christ necessarily implied a promise of obedience to him.

Now as the apostles admitted adult proselytes into the church by baptism, so there is sufficient ground to believe, that they admitted to this ordinance the children of proselytes, in token of God's merciful re-

gard to them, and of their parents' obligation to bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. In this general sense, the baptised offspring of believers are within the church; having God's covenant seal upon them, and being under the care of those who have covenanted to bring them up for him.

As many as are comprehended within God's covenant, and are the subjects of its gracious promises, undeniably belong to the church; for this is founded on the covenant. That the children of professed believers are within the covenant, is evident from passages of scripture, too numerous to be here particularly recited. The promise to Abraham was made also to his infant seed, who were to receive the seal and token of the promise, as well as he; and as many as received it not, were said to have broken God's covenant; and these were to be cut off, or excluded from among their people. Had they not been within the covenant, and among the people of God, their want of the seal could not have been a breach of the

covenant, or an exclusion from the people. Moses says to the congregation of Israel, 'Ye stand all of you before the Lord your God; all the men of Israel, your little ones and your wives; that thou shouldst enter into covenant with the Lord thy God, that he may establish thee for a people to himself, as he hath sworn to Abraham.' Express promises are made to children, as the seed of those who are in covenant, particularly the promise of God's word, and of his spirit. 'God established a testimony in Jacob, which he commanded the fathers, that they should make it known to their children, that the generation to come might also know it.' Circumcision has much the advantage every way, chiefly because to them are committed the oracles of God. To Jacob his servant, and to Israel his chosen, God promises, 'I will pour my spirit on thy seed, and my blessing on thine offspring, and they shall spring up as among the grass, and as willows by the water courses.' This is God's covenant with them who turn from transgression in Jacob. 'My spirit is upon

thee, and my words which I have put in thy mouth, shall not depart out of thy mouth, nor out of the mouth of thy seed.' Infants are called the children of the church; and the gentiles are described in prophecy, as coming to the church with their children in their arms. 'All these gather themselves together and come to thee;' to Zion, God's church, 'they shall bring thy sons in their arms, and thy daughters shall be carried on their shoulders.' The children of those who are in covenant are distinguished from others as God's children, born unto him. God says to his ancient church, 'I entered into covenant with thee, and thou becamest mine; but thou hast taken thy sons and thy daughters, which thou hast borne unto me, and hast sacrificed them: thou hast slain my children.' It is foretold, that in the time of the church's prosperity, 'the people shall not labor in vain, nor bring forth for trouble, for they are the seed of the blessed of the Lord, and their offspring with them.' The Redeemer is described by Isaiah, as one who 'shall feed his flock like a shepherd, and

shall gather the lambs in his arms, and carry them in his bosom.' When he appeared on earth, he commanded that children should be brought to him. Those who were brought, he took into his arms, and blessed, declaring them subjects of his kingdom. But in what sense are they such, if they belong not to his church, but to the kingdom of Satan? When Christ instituted the ordinance of baptism, he pointed out the subjects of it in such general terms, as might naturally be supposed to include children; and his apostles, who knew how he had ever treated children, who had heard his directions concerning them, and who could not be ignorant, that, under former dispensations of the covenant, children were comprehended with their parents, must understand them to be included in this instruction—'disciple all nations, baptising them.' Accordingly, in the first instance of their administering baptism, after this commission, they placed the reason of it, and the right to it, on a basis which alike supports the baptism of believers, and of their children. 'Re-

pent and be baptised for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost, for the promise is to you and to your children.' They considered the children of believers as holy, in distinction from the children of unbelievers. And it appears to have been their practice, when they baptised a believing householder, to baptise also his household; those who were his, and under his government. And it is observable, that among all the instances of baptism, mentioned in the New Testament, we find not one baptised at adult age, who appears to have been born of Christian parents; but they were all proselytes from judaism, or from heathenism.

Our English word *church*, signifies the house, or family of the Lord. It is a well chosen word; for the church is often called, a family or household. But who needs to be told, that children are members of the family in which they are born? It is often called a city, a nation, a people. But who ever imagined that these terms excluded children? If a city is incorporated are not

children members of the corporation, as well as their parents? If a privilege is granted to a people, do not children become entitled to it? If a form of government is settled in a nation, do not children come under the form?

You will ask, how can children be brought within the church without their own consent? But as well may you ask, how should they be born under the gospel; or how should they be created rational beings, without their own consent? If it is a privilege to enjoy the example, instruction and prayers of good men, and to be placed under the care of those who are solemnly bound to give them a pious education, then it is a privilege to be born within the church, and to receive in childhood the seal of the covenant. And will any complain, that God bestows on them mercies, before they had consented to take them?

Certain religious duties are incumbent on children, as soon as they arrive to a natural capacity to perform them. But has not God a right to enjoin such duties as his wis-

dom sees fit? Must he consult his creatures to know what laws he may make for them? Was not the covenant in the plains of Moab made with little ones, as well as with the men of Israel? with those who were not, as well as with those who were, then present? Are there not moral obligations which result from our rational nature, and from our place in the creation, as well as from our special covenant relation to God? Shall we conclude that all these obligations are void, for want of our previous consent? To the validity of contracts between man and man, who stand on the foot of equality, mutual consent is necessary. But God is a sovereign, and 'his covenant he commands us.' When he promises us blessings, and enjoins duties as conditions of the blessings, he states to us the tenor of his covenant, and, by his supreme authority, brings us under the obligations of it, whether we have consented to it, or not.

Now if the children of believers are under the covenant, and within the church of God, they ought to receive the seal and to-

ken of their relation to him; to be taught, as soon as they are able to understand, the nature of religion; and to be considered, when they come forward in life, as under the watch of the church. They should be nursed at her side; and, when they have competency of knowledge, should be invited to her actual communion. If they behave in a manner unworthy of their relation, they should be treated with, and exhorted to repentance. If they prove contumacious and incorrigible, they are, after due patience, to be cut off from their people. Such appears to be the state of children.

IV. We proceed to inquire, what qualifications are requisite for the admission of adults into the church, and for their enjoyment of all gospel ordinances?

The question is twofold. First, What a church ought to require of those whom she admits to her communion? And, Secondly, What qualifications a person must find in himself to justify his coming to the communion?

The first question is, What a church

ought to require of those whom she admits to her communion?

The answer in general is, she is to require the same as the apostles required.

Those whom the apostles admitted to fellowship with them in breaking of bread, and in prayer, being first instructed in the doctrines and evidences of Christianity, professed to believe, that this was a divine religion.

The Jews, who were baptised on the day of Pentecost, gladly received the word of the gospel. The eunuch, who was baptised by Philip, declared his belief, that Jesus was the Son of God. The heart of Lydia was opened to attend to the doctrine of Paul; and she was judged faithful to the Lord. The jailor is said to have believed in God. When the people of Samaria believed Philip, preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, they were baptised, both men and women.

The churches were enjoined to put away from among them those wicked persons who would not be reclaimed. We may, therefore, conclude, that such were not received without a profession of repentance.

A Christian church is, then, to require of those, whom she admits to her communion, these three things; a competent knowledge of the essential doctrines and precepts of religion; a professed belief of, and subjection to them; and a blameless conversation; or, where this had been wanting, a profession of repentance. These things are, in the nature of the case, necessary. For it is palpably absurd for a man to join himself to a Christian church, and attend upon its ordinances, unless he understands the nature, and believes the truth of that religion on which it is founded; and has such a sense of its importance, as to resolve that he will be governed by it. And every person of competent knowledge, a good profession and a correspondent life, has a right, in the view of the church, to the enjoyment of gospel ordinances, whenever he claims it.

Whatever may be the opinion of a church, concerning the necessity of saving grace to qualify one, in the sight of God, for Christian communion, she cannot justly exclude the person we have described; because a

good profession, and a conversation agreeable to it, is all the evidence which she can have in his favor. She can judge the heart only by visible fruits. The controversy concerning the necessity of internal holiness, in the present case, can have no reference to the real practice of the church, in admitting members; for whether she judges this to be a necessary qualification or not, still she must conduct in the same manner, and admit the same persons; namely, those, and only those, who have sufficient knowledge of the gospel, profess a belief of, and subjection to the gospel, and contradict not that profession by an ungodly conversation. She may, perhaps, think proper to require of her members a particular relation of their Christian experiences. But be this relation ever so full, still it is but the evidence of words—of a good profession. The real sincerity of the heart, after all, is known only to Him, who seeth not as man seeth.

A church has no right, on mere jealousy, to exclude from her communion any one who offers himself. She must first make it ap-

pear, that he is, by ignorance, heresy or wickedness, disqualified for communion. It is not incumbent on him to demonstrate his inward grace; but on the church to prove his want of it. The burden of proof, in this case, lies wholly on the church; not on the claimant. If one claims privileges, the church is not to reject him, in a sovereign, arbitrary manner, of her own will, without offering reasons: she is either to admit him, or show cause why she refuses. If she shall convict him of any disqualification, still she is not to treat him as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother; she is not to abandon him at once, but to labor for his amendment. To reject claimants, in any other way, than by conviction on fair and open trial, is to set up a tyranny in the church, which Christ has no where warranted. It is to subvert that liberty with which Christ has made us free. The church ought to caution all against hypocrisy and dissimulation in their approaches to divine ordinances; but she is not to assume the judgment of men's hearts, rashly intruding into things, which she has not seen, and which belong only to God.

We are to aim at perfection, both as private Christians, and as churches. But we are to pursue this aim in a scriptural way; not by usurping God's prerogative, or by excluding from our charity and fellowship, all who hope humbly and speak modestly; all who cannot give the highest proof of their godly sincerity; but by cleansing ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, and by considering one another to provoke unto love and good works.

After all, there will be bad, as well as good, in Christian societies. 'The kingdom of heaven is like a net cast into the sea, which gathered of every kind; and when it was full, they drew it to shore, and gathered the good into vessels and cast the bad away. So shall it be in the end of the world; then the wicked shall be severed from among the just.'

Having shown what a church is to require of those whom she admits to her communion, we proceed to the second question,

What qualifications a person must find in himself to justify him in entering into the

church, and attending on all gospel ordinances?

That we may bring this question within a narrow compass, and reduce it to a single point, it will be necessary to remove some things, which have often been blended with it, and occasioned much confusion in thinking and arguing upon it.

1. The question is not, Whether every person educated under the gospel, is in duty bound to attend on all divine ordinances in some Christian church? For this is universally granted.

Religion, in all its branches, is indispensably enjoined on all men. Christ calls all men to be his disciples, to profess themselves such, and to act accordingly, on pain of final rejection from his presence. No man can free himself from his obligation to enter into the church, any more than he can free himself from his obligation to prayer, or any other duty. His wickedness may be a bar in the way of his admission; but it cannot be an excuse for his voluntary neglect. It is absurd to suppose, that one's sins should va-

cate his obligations to obedience. They who apprehend that they have no right to the communion of saints, ought by no means, to make themselves easy in this state. The command still extends to them; and their immediate concern should be, to repent of that sinfulness, which obstructs their compliance with it.

2. The question is not, whether one ought to come to the communion in an impenitent, unconverted state; for no man is allowed to continue in such a state. The scripture never proposes, or answers this question, whether a man may attend on this, or that ordinance, while he remains impenitent in his sins? because it grants no man permission to remain so; but commands all men, every where, to repent. It requires them to perform every duty in a pious and holy manner. It allows no neglect of, or hypocrisy and formality in duty. The man, who calls himself a sinner, is not to imagine, that the same duties, or the same tempers, are not required of him, as of others; for all are required to be holy in all manner of conver-

sation, and to be deeply humble for all the corruptions of their heart, and errors of their life. But,

3. It will be said, though no man ought to remain in a sinful state, yet there are many who know themselves to be in such a state; many who evidently find, that they have no governing regard to God and his commands, but are under the prevailing love of sin and the world. Now, ought they, while they perceive themselves to be in this state, to come into the church and attend on the holy communion?

If any ask this question, my answer is, it is a question in which no body is concerned. It cannot possibly be a case of conscience with any man. The person here supposed is one, who knows himself to be an habitual sinner; one who has no governing regard to his duty; but is prevailingly bent on wickedness; and, therefore, he cannot be supposed to have any conscientious solicitude about his duty in this matter. It is absurd to imagine, he should be solicitous to know and do his duty here, and yet have no regard to

it in any thing else. If in other external acts of duty he is influenced by unworthy motives, the same unworthy motives, and not a regard to the will of God, would influence him in coming into the church. The question is merely a matter of speculation; it concerns no man's practice. One, who lives regardless of the will of God in general, is just as regardless of it in the case under consideration. He does not wish to be instructed in the matter, that he may conform to the divine will. If he did, he would be as careful to conform to it in things which are already plain. The scripture puts no such case, for it is not a supposable case, that a man, whose heart is set in him to do evil, should have any conscientious scruples in this point, or any other. The proper answer to such an inquirer will be, you are in a most awful state, under the power and guilt of sin. So long as you live in subjection to the flesh you cannot please God. You are exposed to everlasting condemnation. Repent, therefore, of your wickedness, seek God's forgiveness, and

henceforward walk in all his commandments and ordinances blameless.

4. The only question which can be a case of conscience, and which it concerns us to answer, is this—What a serious person ought to do, who is in doubt concerning his spiritual state?

He believes the gospel to be divine, has some sense of its importance, and feels a concern to obtain the salvation which it brings. It is his desire to know, and his purpose to do, the will of God. But still he finds so many corruptions in his heart, and deviations from duty in his practice, that he dares not conclude himself in a state of grace. If he has hopes, they are mingled with painful fears. Now ought such a person to come within the church, and participate in all divine ordinances? Or is he to delay till his fears are dispelled?

This is the real state of the question; and can any hesitate what answer to give?

We have before shown, that the purpose for which men are called into a church state is that, in the enjoyment of suitable means,

they may be trained up in knowledge and holiness, to a preparation for future glory. And if we have the same end in attending on ordinances, as God had in instituting them, it cannot be doubted but we are qualified for the enjoyment of them. If then we can say, our end in coming to the communion is, that we may conform to God's will, may be in the way of his blessing, and may be directed and quickened in his service, we are undoubtedly warranted to approach it.

For a person to judge whether he may come to the communion, the question rather is, what are his present views, desires and purposes, than what is the habitual state of his soul? The former may be known by immediate inward reflection. The latter is to be discovered only by a course of examination and experience.

Let us now attend to the practice of the apostles.

The Jews, who assembled at the temple on the day of pentecost, to celebrate that festival, beheld with indignation, and treated with mockery, the miraculous gifts of the

spirit, then bestowed on the disciples of Jesus, in confirmation of his divine authority. Peter, on this occasion, rose up, and, in a pertinent discourse, laid before them such striking evidence of Jesus being the promised Messiah, that thousands were convinced of their great guilt in rejecting and crucifying the Lord of glory, and anxiously inquired what they must do? Being told, that they must repent and be baptised for the remission of sins, they gladly received the word, and were baptised, and admitted to the apostles' fellowship. It is the doctrine of this same Peter, that believers must make their calling and election sure, by adding to their faith virtue, and to virtue knowledge, and every other grace. But does Peter tell these new converts, that, because they had not had time thus to prove the sincerity of their conversion, it was not safe to receive baptism, and enter into the church? Does he advise them to wait awhile till they could manifest the reality of their repentance by its fruits? No, he admits them to fellowship imme-

diately; but with this important caution, 'save yourselves from this untoward generation.'

In the same manner the apostles conducted in the baptism of Cornelius, the people of Samaria, the jailor, Lydia, and the Ethiopian eunuch.

Had they considered assurance, as a qualification necessary to justify persons in coming into the church, would they not, on these occasions, have cautioned their proselytes against receiving baptism immediately? Would they not have advised them to a greater trial of themselves than could have been made in a few hours?

It cannot be pretended, that these proselytes had a certain knowledge of their own sincerity. Much less can it be supposed, that the apostles knew them to be sound converts. They knew men's hearts no otherwise, than we may know them, by view of what appears in their lives. They could only, hence, form a rational judgment, a charitable presumption. The disciples at Jerusalem believed not Paul to be a dis-

ciple, nor did even the apostles venture to receive him as such, till they had evidence from the testimony of Barnabas. Yea, we find in fact, that they admitted into the Christian church many, who afterward appeared to be ungodly. Simon, the sorcerer, is a remarkable instance. We learn from Paul's epistles, that in most of the churches to which he wrote, there were great numbers of unsound professors. The apostles, therefore, did not know, that all, whom they received into the church, were savingly converted; for it is manifest, that many of them were not so. And since they received new proselytes, whose sincerity must, at present, be doubtful to themselves, as well as others, without the least intimation of a necessity of delaying for the removal of doubts, we may with great safety, conclude, that a serious person, who believes the gospel, and desires to be found in the way of duty, and of the divine blessing, through still in doubt concerning the gracious sincerity of his heart, has a right

to come to the communion of the church.

And indeed, if Christians were to delay, till all their doubts were removed, I am afraid few would come to it at all. And perhaps these few would not be of the better sort. While the self confident hypocrite drew near, the meek, the modest, the humble, would stand afar off.

The members of the church in Corinth, as we learn from Paul's first letter to them, ran into most scandalous disorders in their attendance on the Lord's supper. They behaved in such a riotous manner, as made it evident that they discerned not the Lord's body; distinguished not this ordinance from a common meal, or even from a Pagan festival. One took before others his own supper; and one was hungry, having eaten nothing before he came to it; and another was drunken, having indulged to excess there; and the poorer members were despised. This unworthy partaking the apostle rebukes in the severest terms; and warns them, that they were eating and drinking judgment to them-

selves, of which they had melancholy proof in the sickness and mortality which had been sent among them.

But what advice does he give them in the case? Does he direct them to withdraw from the Lord's table? No, he shows them the danger of coming in this manner, and exhorts them to come better prepared and disposed. 'Let a man examine himself, and so let him eat.' He does not say, let a man examine himself and withdraw; but let him examine and partake. 'And when ye come together, tarry for one another; and if any man hunger, let him eat at home, that ye come not together to condemnation.' This passage, far from being a just ground of discouragement, proves the point which we have stated, that such as have a desire to comply with a divine institution, are not to delay, on account of their humble doubts concerning their conversion. If the fear of unworthy partaking were a reason for not partaking at all, as well might the fear of praying, or reading and hearing the word, in an unworthy manner, be a reason for

omitting these; for it is evident that the scripture enjoins the same temper of heart in these duties, as in that. The truth is, we are required to attend on every ordinance with godly sincerity; and a suspicion of our insincerity is not an excuse for neglect; but a reason for examination, repentance and amendment.

Some perhaps will say, for some have said, we have sensible desires to approach to God in all his ordinances; but there may be desires which are not gracious; and we fear ours are such; we, therefore, dare not approach, for we think less guilt is incurred by abstinence, than by attendance.

But consider, God requires your attendance; and you must either attend or forbear, comply or refuse. There is no medium; and certainly there can be no more grace in your fears, than there may be in your desires. If your desires to attend an ordinance are not spiritual, neither can the fears, which restrain you from attending, be called spiritual. You can, therefore, be no better accepted in your neglect, than in

your compliance; for you act on no better principles in the former, than in the latter.

It is vain to inquire, in what way you shall contract least guilt. Your business is not to contrive how you can sin at the cheapest rate. Your care should be not to sin at all.

If you say, you decline the communion through fear of offending God; examine whether you are not deceived. Are you as conscientious in every thing else, as you would seem to be in this? Are you as much afraid to offend God in other matters, as you pretend to be in this? If you allow yourselves in any sin, or in the neglect of any duty, be assured it is not the fear of offending God, but something else, that hinders your approach to his table. But if you really have such a fear running through all your conduct, and operating in all your deliberate actions, you have a very good evidence of your right to the holy communion: for, in all acts of worship, you serve God acceptably, when you serve him with reverence and godly fear.

The man found at the marriage feast without a wedding garment, fell under the awful censure of the king, who commanded that he should be bound and cast into outer darkness.

Will you say then, it is the safer part not to come to the marriage feast at all, lest being found unworthy, we share the fate of this guest? Remember, they who made light of the king's invitation, and refused to come to his son's marriage, were treated with no more lenity than the unworthy guest. He sent forth his armies, and destroyed them, and burnt up their city. What then shall we conclude? Why, that a wicked man is safe no where. He who will not forsake iniquity, is secure neither in the church nor out of it.

The crime of this guest was, not that he was found at the feast; but that he was found unsuitably attired. The same dirt and rags would have been offensive elsewhere.

The servants were ordered to go out into the highways, and call to the marriage as many as they found; and accordingly gathered to-

gether both bad and good. The man, you see, was a poor beggar, called into the king's house, from out of the street. How should he obtain a wedding garment? He had none of his own. He must come to the king's house to receive one; for there was clean raiment, as well as meat and drink. Where then lay his great crime? Surely not in coming in to the king's house, for he was bidden to come; and such as refused were destroyed; but in sitting among the guests in his ragged and defiled condition, and refusing to wear the pure raiment provided for him. And such will be the condemnation of false professors at the last day; not simply that they have come within God's church, and attended on his ordinances; but that, while they have sat under the gospel dispensation, made a good profession, and enjoyed all the means of holiness, they have continued in the love and practice of their sins; that while they have heard Christ teach in their streets, and have eaten and drunk in his presence, they have been workers of iniquity. We are not to imagine

that we may safely work iniquity, if we will only keep out of the church. Such will be condemned wherever they are found. The kingdom of God is come nigh to us; his word and ordinances are given to us. We cannot place ourselves in the condition of heathens, if we would; for God has placed us in a very different condition. The light has risen upon us; the word of salvation is sent unto us. And now what choice shall we make? If we treat God's ordinances with utter contempt, we are condemned; if we attend upon them in such a manner as to receive no benefit from them, still we are condemned. Our only safety then is, to profess the gospel, and obey it; name the name of Christ and depart from iniquity; this is to come to the marriage supper, and put on the wedding garment.

Let us fear lest we receive the grace of God in vain. Let us beware lest our privileges, instead of being the means of our salvation, serve only to aggravate our final condemnation.

You see how the case stands. All are

required to come within God's church, and attend on his appointed ordinances; and none are allowed to do this in a hypocritical and ungodly manner.

Your duty lies plain before you; study no evasions. God's commands are express; your obligation to obey is indispensable. Attend on the ordinance in question, and every other, as you have opportunity; keep in view the end of their institution, which is the promotion of faith and purity. Imagine not that ordinances operate by a kind of charm, to do you good without making you better; you will only be accepted in hearing Christ teach, and in eating in his presence, when you also depart from iniquity. For his kingdom is not merely 'meat and drink, but righteousness and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.'

CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP.

1 CORIN. I. 2.

Unto the church of God, which is at Corinth; to them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, with all that in every place call on the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours.

We have already considered the nature of a Christian church; the purpose of its institution; the relation of children to it; and the qualifications necessary to an attendance on its ordinances.

What now lies before us is,

V. To explain that fellowship, or communion, which does, or ought to subsist among professing Christians, whether in the same or in divers churches.

To this subject, we are led by the last clause in our text; 'Grace and peace to the church of God in Corinth, with all who, in every place, call on the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours.'

We are here taught, that, as all Chris-

tians, in whatever place they may dwell, or may worship, are disciples of the same Lord, and call on God in the name of the same Mediator; so there is an important relation, and ought to be a sacred fellowship among them.

For the illustration of this matter, I would observe,

1. There is a virtual fellowship or communion among all true saints, whether near or remote, whether known or unknown to each other. They are all engaged in the same design, united in the same interest, and partakers of many of the same things.

This is the sense in which the word is most frequently used in scripture; and this is analogous to the sense which it ordinarily bears in common life. Particularly,

Real saints have fellowship in the gospel. They have received one and the same rule of faith and practice. Though they may differ in their opinions concerning some particular things contained in the gospel, yet their sentiments in the essential doctrines and precepts of it, are the same.

They have received one common faith; like precious faith. Though their faith may differ in its extent and degree, yet, in its object, nature and influence, it is one and the same. The object of it is divine truth; the nature of it is receiving the love of the truth; the influence of it is purifying the heart.

They are all formed to the same holy temper. They are renewed after the image of God; are joint partakers of a divine nature. There may be great variety in the time, manner and circumstances of their renovation, and in the strength and degree of the Christian temper; but holiness, in its general nature, is the same in all. It is a conformity to God's moral character.

They are all partakers of the same divine spirit. There are diversities of gifts and operations; but it is the same spirit that worketh all in all. Hence the apostle speaks of 'the fellowship of the spirit, and the communion of the Holy Ghost.'

They are engaged in the same good work, in the same great design. They are work-

ing out their salvation, and promoting in their respective places, the interest of Christ's kingdom. They are fellow laborers in the same service, the service of God and their own souls. They are fellow workers in the same holy calling. They are fellow soldiers in the same spiritual warfare; fighting against the same enemies, sin, satan, and the world; applying the same armor, the shield of faith, the helmet of hope, the breastplate of righteousness, and the sword of the spirit; and they act under the same leader, Jesus the captain of their salvation.

They have one common interest. They have a joint interest in the blessed God; for there is one God and Father of all, who is above all, through all, and in them all. They bear the same relation to Jesus Christ; for there is one Lord and Saviour, by whom are all things, and they by him. There is one common salvation, in which they all are sharers. They are all justified by the same atonement, washed in the same blood, sanctified by the same grace, and saved by the same intercession. They have an interest

in the same promises, and a title to the same inheritance. They are called in the same hope, and are joint heirs of the same glory. They are fellow citizens with the saints, and of the household of God.

In these respects, there is a fellowship among all sincere Christians. In many of these things, saints on earth have communion with those in heaven.

One cannot but remark here, how diverse this fellowship is, from that which some boast of; a mutual sympathy, or fellow feeling, between sincere Christians, by which one immediately perceives the grace, and knows the character of another. The scripture never uses the word fellowship in this sense, nor does it speak of any such thing in other terms. It is certain, that the apostles and first Christians were not acquainted with such a sympathetic intercourse of spirits. If they were, why did not the eleven disciples discern, that Judas was a hypocrite? Why did not the Christians of Jerusalem believe Paul to be a disciple? Why did not they feel his graces, when, after his

conversion, he essayed to join himself to them? Why could not the apostles themselves be satisfied of his conversion, without the testimony of Barnabas? What occasion was there, that Christians should carry with them letters of commendation, as we find they did, when they travelled to places where they had not been known.

As the gospel knows no such correspondence of heart between Christians; and never once uses the word fellowship, or communion in any such sense, it is a perversion of scripture, as well as reason, to pretend to such a thing now, and call it by a scripture name. I proceed to observe,

2. Besides the virtual communion, before described, among sincere Christians, there is an actual communion among those who are known to, and have intercourse with, one another. This consists in mutual regards and good offices.

The good Christian extends his benevolence to all, to strangers, heathens and enemies; and, from this principle, shows kindness to all, as far as their occasions require,

and his circumstances permit. But for them who appear to him in the character of saints, he has a love, not only of benevolence, but also of esteem and approbation. He wishes well to all, whether good or bad; but he values men chiefly according to their virtuous conversation. While he is disposed to do good to all, he reckons himself under some superior obligations to those who are of the household of faith. He delights in the saints as the excellent of the earth, and is the companion of them who fear God. He loves the brethren, and such he esteems all Christians, whether they belong to the same society with him, or to another. He confines not his regard to those of his own sect, or his own particular community; but, like the apostles, extends it to all who, in every place, call on the name of Jesus Christ, their Lord, as well as his, and the common Saviour of them who believe.

In order to the exercise of true Christian love, it is not necessary to know the sincerity of men's hearts. It is enough that, by their profession and conversation, they ap-

pear to us in the character of Christian brethren, and by their works give us reasonable ground to think they have faith. We may, in a proper sense, have this actual fellowship with one who is not a sincere Christian; and may not have it with one who is such. So long as Judas appeared in the character of a disciple, his brethren had fellowship with him; they esteemed him, placed confidence in him, and even thought him better than themselves; but with Paul, the disciples at Jerusalem had not this actual fellowship; they confided not in him, nor believed him to be a disciple, till he produced some proper evidence of a change in his sentiments and practice.

3. There is also a special communion, which does, or ought to take place among those Christians, who are united in the same particular church, or religious society.

As they have explicitly covenanted together for social worship and common edification, so they are under peculiar obligations to each other, unitedly to pursue this important purpose.

This special communion principally consists in a joint attendance on the ordinances of Christ.

It is said of those who received the word preached by Peter, on the day of pentecost, 'that they continued stedfast in the apostle's doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread and in prayers. They were together, and continued daily with one accord in the temple; praising God.' The apostle to the Hebrews exhorts the professors of religion, 'that they consider one another, to provoke to love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of themselves together.' St Paul speaks of the Corinthian believers, as 'coming together in the church, and into one place.' He represents the whole church as 'coming together in one place,' for breaking of bread, for social prayer, and for attendance on the preaching of the word. These expressions teach us, that the members of a particular church ought to walk together in the ordinances, and unitedly to attend on the stated worship of God, as they are able, without unnecessary neglect.

And, indeed, it is included in the very idea of a particular church, that they worship God together, at the same time, and in the same place. The apostle directs the Corinthians, when they come together, to tarry for one another; for which surely there could be no reason, if they might disperse here and there, and some worship in one place, and some in another, and some no where.

The acceptableness of worship, indeed, depends not on the place where it is performed. But it much depends on a spirit of peace and union among the worshippers. For this reason, the church is to come together into one place, that there may be no schism, but all her members may with one mind, and one mouth glorify God. They must be builded together, that they may become an habitation of God through the spirit; must be fitly framed together, that they may grow into a holy temple in the Lord.

There may be frequent occasions for the members of the same church to meet for social worship in different places, and even in

private houses. Paul, when he abode in Ephesus, preached and taught both publicly, and from house to house. We are not to imagine a temple, or public house, so peculiarly sacred, that divine worship can no where else be useful to men, or pleasing to the Deity. The private meetings of Christians, conducted with a real view to peace and edification, are much to be commended. But when any of the members of a church withdraw from the usual place of worship, and assemble elsewhere, either with an intention to cause division, or in a manner which tends to it, they violate the order of Christ's house, and interrupt the communion which ought to subsist in it. Though Paul taught from house to house, yet he approved not those teachers, who crept into houses to lead the simple captive, and disturb Christian fellowship. He warns Christians to mark and avoid those who cause divisions, for such serve not the kingdom of Christ, but their own private designs. One great end of social worship is peace and union; and it ought always to be conducted in a

manner which tends not to defeat, but promote this end. It is not the sacredness of one place rather than another, but the common edification, which obliges the whole church to come together in one place. The members no longer walk in fellowship, than they thus unitedly attend the sacred orders of Christ's house.

Among divine ordinances, the Lord's supper deserves particular attention; for one main design of this was, to be a mean of brotherly communion. Eating and drinking together, at the same table, is a natural act of fellowship. 'The cup which we bless, and the bread which we break, is the communion of Christ's blood, and of his body;' and by our joint participation of them, we acknowledge ourselves to be one family, the children of one parent, the disciples of one Lord. 'We being many are one body, and one bread,' or loaf; 'for we are all partakers of that one loaf.' This ordinance is a love feast, and ought to be 'kept, not with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.'

No trifling causes should divert or detain us from it; and no evil passions accompany us in it.

And here I cannot but take notice of a practice too common among the professors of religion; their withdrawing from the Lord's table, because a particular brother has injured, or offended them; for which I find no foundation in the gospel. We are, indeed, to 'withdraw from every brother who walks disorderly.' But how? By breaking up the communion? No, but by 'putting away the wicked person from among us; and by purging out the old leaven, that we may be a new lump.' We may think our brother unworthy of the privilege which he assumes; but shall his unworthiness deprive us of the privilege? We are, in proper season, to take the measures prescribed in the gospel, for his reformation; but in the mean time, we are neither to absent ourselves from the table, nor to forbid his attendance; for we can justly exclude him only by conviction in a regular process. If the case is so circumstanced, that sufficient evidence for his con-

viction cannot be produced, he must be left to the Judge of all men. Whatever our opinion may be of his guilt, we are not to withdraw on account of his attendance. Judge nothing before the time.

You will say, Charity is necessary in our attendance at Christ's table, but with such a brother, how can we sit down in charity? People often confound themselves in this matter, by their partial notions of charity. If by charity were intended an opinion of others as good Christians, you could not sit down in charity with those of whom you thought otherwise. But where do you find this description of charity? or where is this good opinion of all your fellow communicants required, in order to your sitting at Christ's table? It is the effect, not the essence of charity, to hope all things. If you have a benevolent, meek, forgiving temper toward those whom you think not to be true Christians, you can sit down in charity with them; for this is the scriptural idea of charity. If you remember a brother hath ought against you, go and be recon-

ciled to him. If you have aught against a brother, go and tell him his fault. If he repent, forgive him; if he repent not, still indulge no rancór nor hatred in your heart. Thus sit down at the feast in charity, in kind affection, to your brethren and to all men.

Perhaps some will say, 'We withdraw from the table when a brother has injured us, because his presence awakens in us unsuitable passions.'

But remember, the indulgence of malevolent passions is your sin; and you are not to absent yourselves from communion, but to dismiss them; and so keep the feast in sincerity and love. Malice and illwill indulged in the heart are wrong, whoever is the object, whether a brother, or a heathen. And on this plea, you might as well withdraw, when the latter, as when the former had done you an injury.

Consider also, you are required to pray, and to hear the word, with the same charity which is required in the supper. 'When you stand praying, you are to forgive if you have aught against any man.' And you are

to 'lay apart all guile, malice and envy;' and thus to 'desire the sincere milk of the word; receiving it with meekness.' Your plea, therefore, might as well be urged for neglecting public worship, or even family prayer, be sure, if the offender happens to be present, as for absenting from the supper.

The truth is, you are never to excuse yourselves from acts of duty, on account of evil passions working in you; but immediately to war against them.

It will be asked, How can I have communion with a church, while she tolerates ungodly and scandalous members?

But let me ask you, my friend, does she tolerate them? If she does, whose business is it to take the first step towards rectifying the disorder? It is yours, as much as any man's. It is yours principally. You pretend, that you see such persons in the church. Others perhaps see them not, or have not evidence against them. Have you reproved them? Have you taken a brother or two to assist you? Have you brought

your complaint to the church? If you have done none of these things, you are the most reprehensible of any member; for you see the sin, and expose it not. Go first, and do your own duty. You can have no pretence for withdrawing, till you know that the church actually tolerates vicious characters; and this you cannot know till you have taken the measures which Christ enjoins.

But though I may think a church to be, in the main, a true church, yet if I see errors in her, ought I not to testify against them by withdrawing from them? By no means. Your withdrawing is no testimony against her particular errors; it is only a general, indiscriminate charge. It signifies that you are displeased at something; but points out nothing. You are to commune with her; but not adopt her errors; then your conduct will speak an intelligible language. Christ testified against the errors of the Jewish church, and labored for her reformation; but still he held communion with her as a church of God. Let his example be your rule.

This leads me to observe farther, that special fellowship among the members of a particular church must include mutual watchfulness, reproof and exhortation.

As Christians, in the present state, are but imperfect, one end of their covenanting and associating together is, that they may afford mutual assistance in the great concerns of religion, and be fellow helpers in the work of their common salvation. Accordingly, they are required to consider and admonish, comfort and encourage one another, as there is occasion; to be all subject one to another, and to be clothed with humility. By virtue of our special relation, as members of one church, we are to rebuke our brethren, and not suffer sin upon them. Those who offend, we are first to address in a more private manner: them who are deaf to private expostulations, we are to bring before the church; such as contemn the counsels of the church are to be cut off from her communion; but the penitent are to be restored in the spirit of meekness.

Again, Our special fellowship requires mutual candor, condescension and forbearance.

We are to consider ourselves, and our brethren, not as sinless, but imperfect beings, attended with infirmities, subject to temptations, liable to offend, and to be offended. While we are cautious not to give offence by doing things grievous to them, we should make all reasonable allowances for them, when they do things grievous to us. We should neither stiffly oppose, nor zealously urge indifferent matters. We should not severely animadvert on smaller faults, nor magnify accidental failings into heinous crimes; but give every one's conduct the most favorable turn it will bear. Such is the apostle's advice. 'We that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves. Let every one of us please his neighbor for his good to edification. Him who is weak in the faith receive ye; but not to doubtful disputation. Let us not judge one another; but judge this rather, that no man put a stumbling block in his brother's way. Be

of the same mind one toward another. Condescend to men of low estate. Let no man seek his own, but every man another's wealth. Follow the things which make for peace and edification. Let all your things be done with charity.'

4. The last branch of christian fellowship, which I shall mention, is that which ought to subsist among different churches; among all who, in every place, call on the name of our common Lord.

As all Christian churches are united under, and subject to one head, so they are members one of another, and therefore ought, like the members of the natural body, to preserve a reciprocal intercourse. The apostle says, 'As the body is one and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ. For by one spirit are we all baptised into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles; whether we be bond or free.' Care, therefore, should be taken, 'that there be no schism, or division in the body, but all the members should have the same care one for another.'

A particular church ought to consider herself, not as an unconnected society, but as a part of Christ's general kingdom; her care must not be confined to herself, but extended to her sister churches. She is to seek, not merely her own profit but the profit of many.

Some diversity of sentiment and practice may take place in different churches, and yet all remain true churches, of Christ; as there may be divers opinions among the members of the same church, and they still be real Christians. We are neither to reject a church, or to exclude a particular Christian from our fellowship, for supposed errors, which appear not to be of such a nature and magnitude, as to subvert the foundation of Christianity. Our apostle teaches us, that we are to regard all as our fellow Christians, and all churches as sister churches, who, in every place, call on the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours; who profess one body, one spirit, and one hope of their calling: and who hold the same head from which all the body is knit together. In a word, he cautions us, that 'we reject not those whom God has re-

ceived.' If we know a particular church, in which errors are admitted, we are to afford our assistance for her amendment. But so long as we believe God owns her, by continuing to her his word and ordinances, and blessing them for her spiritual benefit, it is arrogance, it is impiety, for us to disown her. We have no warrant to withdraw our fellowship from a church, unless she has essentially departed from the gospel, or imposed on us terms of fellowship, which we cannot in conscience comply with.

If it be asked, in what actions different churches are to have fellowship? I answer;

They ought occasionally to commune with each other in the word, prayer, and breaking of bread; to admit each other's members to occasional communion with them; to recommend their own members to other churches, into whose vicinity they may remove; and to receive members of other churches on their recommendation. When Apollos passed from Ephesus into Achaia, the brethren in Ephesus wrote to the disciples in Achaia to receive him. When Phebe went from

Cenchrea to Rome, Paul wrote to the Roman church, that they should receive her in the Lord as becometh saints.

Churches are also to have fellowship by mutual counsel and advice, when difficulties arise.

Though no church, or number of churches have an absolute jurisdiction over other churches, yet they should always be ready to afford help and assistance, at the request of sister churches, as occasions may require. We find in the history of the Acts, that the church of Antioch, on a difficulty which arose there relating to circumcision, sent Barnabas and Paul, and certain others with them, to Jerusalem, to consult the apostles and elders of the church there, and to ask their advice upon the matter. When those messengers from Antioch came to Jerusalem, they were received by the apostles and elders, and by the church. And when the apostles had determined the matter in question, they, together which the church, sent messengers, and by them, a letter to the Antiochean and other churches in the

vicinity, declaring their opinion and advice in the case referred to them.

This example, as well as the reason of the thing, shows the propriety and necessity of mutual assistance among churches by counsel and advice, in order to the common edification and comfort.

I have now distinctly illustrated the several matters proposed to your consideration. Permit me, before I conclude, to point out to you the proper improvement of this subject.

We, who have made an open profession of religion, and have joined ourselves to the church of God, with an explicit engagement to walk together in his commandments and ordinances, are now called upon to consider the obligations we are under, and the duties especially incumbent upon us.

1. Let us be well settled in the principles of the religion which we profess.

We are called into a church state, that, being called in the faith and knowledge of the Son of God we may be no more children, carried about with every wind of doctrine,

by the slight of men, and by cunning craftiness wherewith they lie in wait to deceive. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever. His gospel is ever the same; not variable like the humors and opinions of men. Therefore, be ye not carried about with divers and strange doctrines, as if religion was sometimes one thing, and sometimes another. It is a good thing that the heart be established with grace. We ought not indeed to be stiff and inflexible in our own sentiments and usages, merely because they are our own. We should give up former opinions, and adopt others, when evidence is offered sufficient to justify the change. But then a fickleness of temper, a versatility of sentiment, a disposition to fall in with every novel opinion, and to follow every impulse of fancy, is utterly unbecoming a Christian. Such unsteadiness indicates either the want of competent knowledge, or the want of any fixed principles in religion.

Amidst the various opinions, which are propagated and maintained, an honest Chris-

tian, I am sensible, may often be perplexed to determine what is truth. But then, I would observe, it is by no means necessary, that he should be able to answer every argument adduced in support of error. There are certain great and leading principles, in which every Christian must be supposed to be settled; and by these he may try the doctrines proposed to him, and judge whether they be of God.

There are two grand points, which the gospel always keeps in view. One is the indispensable necessity of holiness in heart and life, in order to eternal happiness. The other is, our entire dependence on the favor and mercy of God, through the Redeemer, for pardon, sanctification and glory. Every man, who professes to be a Christian, must be supposed to be settled in these grand points. The man, who imagines that he is not indebted to, nor dependent on a Saviour, or that there is no need of a conformity to his holy pattern and precepts, in order to final salvation, can, with no consistency, pretend to be a Christian.

All such doctrines, as plainly contradict either of these principles; such, on the one hand, as exalt men above a dependence on Jesus Christ, and the influences of the divine spirit; and such, on the other hand, as confound the difference between virtue and vice, and obstruct the influence of the divine commands, must be rejected, whatever specious arguments may be urged in their favor.

2. Let us maintain a constant, devout attendance on the appointed ordinances of Christ.

If we carelessly neglect these, we contradict the design of a church, and our own character as members of it.

Christians are bound to attend on all ordinances, one as well as another. The gospel makes no distinction. The primitive Christians continued steadfast in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayer.

There are among us some, who profess the religion of Christ, and who, by their regular attendance at the sanctuary, as well as by

their general conversation, express a regard for the religion which they profess; but yet absent themselves from the Lord's table. Such was not the practice of Christians in the apostolic times. The celebration of the supper was then a part of the stated worship of the Lord's day; and in this, as well as in other parts, all professors joined. They continued steadfast in fellowship with the apostles, as well by breaking bread, as by prayer and doctrine. The disciples at Troas, we are told, came together, on the first day of the week, not only to hear Paul preach, but also to break bread.

I urge none to come blindly, or against his conscience, to the holy table. Every one must judge for himself, and be persuaded in his own mind. One man cannot see with another's eyes, nor act on another's faith. But then, it is a plain fact, Christ calls all to be his disciples, and commands all his disciples to show forth his death by an attendance on his supper. And therefore, such as are hindered by scruples concerning their fitness, must not make themselves easy with them, but take

pains for the removal of them. They must seek light, that, if they are in an error, they may rectify it; and if they are under sin, they may repent of it. They must humbly apply to God for his grace to lead them into truth, and to purify their souls; and whatever doubts they have about a particular ordinance, they must diligently attend on all those means which they think themselves warranted to use. 'The meek, God will guide in judgment; the meek he will teach his way.'

3. We are called to brotherly love, peace and unity.

The gospel urges love as the bond of perfectness, as a virtue of the first importance. Paul, in his epistles to the churches, never forgets to recommend to them, that they be joined together in the same mind, speak the same things, that they have the same love, that there be no divisions among them, that they avoid such as cause divisions and offences. To show how essential unity is to the being of a church, he compares it to a household, which subsists by love, and in which all the mem-

bers have one interest, and are guided by one head; to a building, all the parts of which are framed and compacted together; to a natural body, all whose limbs are animated by the same vital principle, and feel for each other.

Brotherly love is an extensive grace. It it is not confined to those of our own society; but reaches to all Christians, and Christian societies in every place. The apostle wishes grace and peace to all, who, in every place, call on the name of Jesus. We are to consider all as our brethren, who appear to hold the essentials of Christian faith, and to maintain a practice agreeable to it; and to all such, brotherly love must extend. If our love reaches no farther than to those of our own sect, or those who usually worship with us, it is only a party spirit; it has nothing of the nature of Christian love.

Against such a contracted idea of love, the apostle, in our context, carefully guards us. 'It has been declared to me,' says he, 'that there are contentions among you. Every one of you saith, I am of Paul, and I of

Apollos, and I of Cephas, and I of Christ.' They were puffed up for one teacher against another. One admired this preacher; another that; and another a third; and, by their party attachments, raised troublesome disputes and dangerous contentions in the church. But, says he, 'Is Christ divided?' Were ye not all baptised in his name? Have ye not all professed his religion? Why then run ye into parties, as if Christ was divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Why say ye, We are of Paul? Do ye expect salvation through him? He was not crucified for you. He only preaches Christ crucified; and Peter and Apollos do the same. 'Or were ye baptised in the name of Paul?' Do ye imagine that baptism was designed to form you into distinct sects? or that every one ought to follow the minister who baptised him, in opposition to others? And do ye think, that ye ought to love and esteem, as brethren, those only who are baptised by the same apostle, or in the same place and manner as ye were, as if ye were baptised in the name of the man, who baptised you?

No, ye were baptised in the name of Christ, and are become members of his body, and, therefore, ye are the brethren of all Christians, by whomsoever baptised; for ye are all baptised into one body.

You see, that baptism, a Christian profession, and a relation to a particular church, are not designed to unite one company of Christians here, and another there, in opposition to each other; but rather to unite the whole Christian world. This then, and this only, is true Christian love, which extends its good wishes to the whole household of faith; regards, as Christ's disciples, all who, in every place, call on his name; and pursues, not merely its own private ends, but the general interest of Christ's kingdom, and the common welfare of his subjects.

True Christian love to those of our own society cannot stop short of a general love of saints. The love of the brethren, as such, is a love of their holy and virtuous character; and if, on this account we love our nearest brethren, for the same reason we shall love all, who exhibit the same character. The good christian desires the preva-

lence of religion every where. He would rejoice that all men were virtuous and happy. He will not, therefore, pursue the religious interest of his own community, family or person, in ways prejudicial to the general interest of religion. He will not consult merely his own edification, or that of those with whom he is immediately connected; but will seek the profit of many, that they may be saved.

This love of the brethren leads to a more general love of the human race. Christians are required 'to add to their brotherly kindness charity;' 'to increase and abound in their love one toward another, and toward all men.'

One who loves the brethren, because they have the temper and obey the laws of Christ, must be supposed himself to have the same temper, and to obey the same laws. Christ exemplified, and has enjoined a universal philanthropy. He did good to his enemies, as well as friends; he prayed for his crucifiers, as well as for his disciples; and he has enjoined on us the same extensive benevolence.

Whatever pretensions we make to Chris-

tian fellowship, if our love is confined to any particular community, or even to Christian professors, and does not, in suitable expressions of meekness, goodness and moderation, extend itself to others; it is not that love of the brethren which Christ enjoins; for where brotherly kindness is, there will be charity. The brotherly love, which Christ has taught, will make us meek and gentle toward all men. It will tame and soften the passions, correct and sweeten the temper, and dispose us to show kindness to all men, whether they be Christians or heathens, good men or sinners.

4. As members of the church of God, we are all called to an exemplary holiness.

Christ gave himself for the church, that he might sanctify it, and finally present it glorious. We are called to be saints; separated from the world, that we may be a peculiar people, zealous of good works; placed under gospel light, that we may be the children of God without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, shining among them as lights in the world. The honor of religion, and our own profes-

sion, oblige us to walk circumspectly among men. Those, whom the apostles admitted to their fellowship, were exhorted to keep themselves from an untoward generation. The loose and unguarded conversation of Christian professors, gives occasion to others to speak reproachfully of religion itself. They are, therefore, to walk in wisdom toward them who are without; to provide things honest in the sight of all men, that the enemies of truth may be put to silence, having no evil thing to say of them.

5. Let us exercise a mutual watchfulness in our Christian relation.

We are called into this relation, that we may by love serve one another, and be fellow workers to the kingdom of God. Let us be ready to receive, as well as to give, counsel and reproof, as there is occasion; and in this imperfect state occasions will be frequent. Much allowance is indeed to be made for human weakness, for misapprehension, and for wrong report. We expect such allowance from our brethren, and they are entitled to it from us. Too great forwardness to remark, and too hasty a zeal to

reprove every trivial fault, and every unguarded action in our brethren, will tend rather to vex, than reform them; rather to hurt our influence, than to mend their tempers. Reproof is a delicate matter. It is not to be omitted, when occasion calls for it; but it should be given with tenderness and prudence, that it may be received with meekness and gratitude.

6. Our subject reminds us of the duty which we owe to our youth.

If the children of professing Christians are within God's visible church, they are entitled to our particular notice and regard. Though it should be conceded, that baptism denominates them members of the catholic church only, and they become not members of any local church, till, by their own act, they join themselves to it, yet there is a duty which that church peculiarly owes to them, in which they were publicly given up to God, of which their parents are members, and under the immediate inspection of which they live and act. If they are members of the church at large, those Chris-

tians, among whom providence places them, and who are witnesses of their conduct, are especially bound to watch over them.

We ought, then, to admonish and reprove them, whenever we see them behave in a manner unsuitable to the relation, which they bear to Christ; to rebuke their levity, impiety and profaneness, that we may restrain them from making themselves vile; to put them in remembrance of the sacred obligations, which they are under; and call their attention to that solemn day, when every work will be brought into judgment.

While they are under the immediate government of parents or others, it becomes us, in the most tender and friendly manner to give those, who have the care of them, information of their misbehaviour, when it is gross and repeated, and appears to proceed from a perverse disposition. If Christians would thus assist each other in the government of their families, at the same time exhibiting an example worthy of their character, much service might be done to the rising generation, and to the general interest of religion.

When youth have arrived to competent age, it would be proper that the church, as a body, should deal with them for open immoralities, obstinately persisted in against more private admonitions; unless they disavow their relation to the church, and her authority over them. In this case she may, in a formal manner cut them off from among their people, and declare them no longer under her care.

7. Our subject deserves the serious attention of the youth.

My children, God, in his good providence, has ordered the place of your birth and education, under the light of the gospel, within his church, and in Christian families. The most of you have been solemnly dedicated to God in baptism, and have received the visible seal of his covenant. See then, that you walk worthy of the privileges to which you are born, and of the character which you bear, as God's children, set apart to be his. Receive, with filial reverence and obedience, the instructions and counsels of your parents, who have bound

themselves to God for your virtuous behaviour. Attend on the appointed means of religious knowledge, converse with the holy scriptures and other instructive books, seriously regard the stated services of the sanctuary, and endeavor in the use of these advantages, to become wise to salvation, and to furnish yourselves unto every good work. As you have been consecrated to God, live to him. 'Be not conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds.' Let your hearts be impressed with a sense of your sinful and helpless condition; look to Jesus as the only Saviour of a lost and guilty world: go to God in his name, and humbly implore the renewing and sanctifying influences of his holy spirit. Make an actual dedication of yourselves to God through Jesus Christ, deliberately resolving on a course of pure religion, and let all your conversation be as becomes the gospel. Keep up a daily correspondence with God in secret. Think and speak of him with reverence, detesting and avoiding every species of profanity.

Cease to hear the instructions which cause to err from the words of knowledge. Entertain no licentious opinions, such as would encourage vice, or pacify the conscience under guilt. Say to evil doers, depart from us, for we will keep the commandments of our God. Flee youthful lusts, and follow after righteousness, faith, charity, peace, with them who call on the Lord out of a pure heart. And rest not till you have actually taken the covenant bonds on yourselves, by a public profession of religion, and have come up to all gospel ordinances. Do not this rashly and thoughtlessly, but humbly and seriously, in the fear of God, and in obedience to him. Think not that you have a right to live at large. You are bound to confess Christ's name before men, and to submit to the government of his church. It was foretold by the prophet, that, when God should pour out his spirit on the offspring of his people, one would say, I am the Lord's, and another would subscribe with his hand to the Lord. Thus the church would increase by the accession of the

young; her sons would come from far; and her daughters be nursed at her side. You cannot be said to have fulfilled the obligations of your baptism, so long as you live in a careless neglect of any of the ordinances of Christ. There is reason to believe, that, in the institution of the supper, Christ had a primary regard to the young, who were always the objects of his particular attention. This ordinance was instituted immediately after the celebration of the passover, which was a figure of the suffering Saviour. In allusion to that festival, Christ is called our passover, sacrificed for us. And in allusion to the manner in which the passover was eaten, we are required to keep the feast of the holy supper, 'not with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.' Now the special reason assigned for the passover was, that 'when children in time to come should inquire, what mean ye by this service?' The parent might thence take occasion to instruct them 'how the Lord saved his people from Egypt.' Accordingly the youth

were to attend on the passover, in the appointed place, as soon as they were able to 'bring an offering in their hand.' Now if the supper succeeds in the place of the passover, was not this one intention of it, that the young, on seeing this service, might be led to inquire, what was meant by it, and thus open the way for instruction in the glorious redemption by Jesus Christ? Come then, my children, attend a festival appointed for you. Here behold what your affectionate Saviour has done and suffered for such lost and helpless creatures as you. Behold, admire and love; smite your breasts, and return with new sentiments of the evil of your sins, and new resolutions of future obedience. Remember that all ordinances, and this in particular, were instituted as means of promoting a holy life; and 'let every one, who nameth the name of Christ, depart from iniquity.'

8. The invitation given to the young shall now be addressed to others. Come join yourselves to the Lord in perpetual covenant, which shall not be forgotten.

The Son of God has come down from

heaven, and has purchased a church with his own blood. Here he offers that salvation which guilty mortals need. He prescribes the terms on which it may become yours. He has appointed ordinances, in the use of which you may be made meet for the enjoyment of it in Heaven. He has particularly instituted the ordinance of the supper, to remind you of his dying love, and the rich blessings purchased by his blood. He has required your attendance, to awaken your remembrance of him, warm your love to him, and strengthen your faith in him.

Have you any sense of your guilt and unworthiness, and of his wonderful goodness, and love? any desire to become conformed to his image, attempered to his gospel, and entitled to his salvation? any gratitude to your Divine Benefactor for all the great things which he has done and suffered for you? any purpose of heart to honor and obey your glorious Redeemer and Lord? any concern to promote peace and unity among his disciples, to excite and encourage them to love and good works, and to advance the general interest of his kingdom?

Then come and confess his name, declare your regard to his religion, subscribe with your own hand to him, attend on the ordinances of his house, walk in fellowship with his professed disciples, join your influence to promote his cause, and show by your holy conversation, that you really believe, and heartily love the religion which you profess.

To conclude, let us all unite our endeavors to make Christ's church glorious. Let us as workers together with Christ, and with one another, contribute in our respective places, and according to our several abilities, to edify and enlarge it. Let us not content ourselves with appearing as members of the visible church here below; but be concerned to become real members of the invisible church above, that when the time of our departure is come, we may go to Mount Zion, the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels, the spirits of just men made perfect, the general assembly and church of the first born, whose names are enrolled in heaven.

A DISCOURSE

DELIVERED IN

BOSTON, MAY, 1832,

BEFORE THE

SOCIETY FOR PROMOTING CHRISTIAN KNOWLEDGE, PIETY AND CHARITY.

BY JOSEPH ALLEN, OF NORTHBOROUGH.

DANIEL XII. 8.

Then said I, O my Lord, what shall be the end of these things?

It has fallen to the lot of the men of this generation, to be the witnesses of great and memorable changes in the moral and political world and in the whole frame and constitution of society. The present is emphatically the age of revolutions. A spirit of bold and fearless investigation has gone abroad, from which nothing can hide itself; and against which no work of human art or device can stand. Important revolutions have already, since the memory of man,

been effected in the prevailing customs of society and sentiments of men; and the signs of the times indicate with much clearness, other changes, of a still more important character, as the result of causes now in operation. It is not indeed given to man to interpret these signs with an infallible skill; but it is lawful to conjecture, where certain knowledge is unattainable; and, guided by the light of history and experience, as well as by the intimations of the divine word, we may reason with a good degree of confidence from the things that are or that have been, to what will be hereafter. 'That which hath been,' says the Hebrew sage, 'is now, and that which is to be hath already been, and God requireth that which is past.'

What then, we are prompted to ask, shall be the end of these things? of the habits, opinions, and spirit, which give a character to the present age? What are the signs of the times? What do they portend? Is the prospect before us encouraging, or disheartening? Is the tendency of things onward and upward, or the reverse?

These questions open a wide field on which I shall have time barely to enter, without attempting to explore it in all its extent.

1. It will be admitted without controversy, that the present age is one of progressive improvement in knowedge. We seem to behold the literal fulfilment of the prophetic declaration: 'Many shall run to and fro and knowledge shall be increased.' The boundaries of science are every year enlarged; and, owing to the increased facilities for education, the proportion of the grossly ignorant to the whole population, is continually diminishing. Nor is it merely secular knowledge that is diffusing itself through the community. The study of the Scriptures was probably never more general, or conducted with more wisdom than at the present day. The Sunday school system of instruction, especially as it has been modified within the last few years, must be regarded as a most efficient instrument of unfolding to the young mind the treasures contained in the sacred volume and of exciting it to the love and practice of whatsoever is good and excellent.

Doubtless much of the knowledge that is gained in the Sunday school is superficial and mingled with error. But after every deduction has been made for the incompetency of teachers or the imperfections of the system, the benefits that must result from this noble institution cannot be easily overrated.

I feel constrained, therefore, to look with much confidence and hope on the growing interest that is felt and the increased labor that is bestowed on the intellectual and christian improvement of the young. I look upon it as one of most auspicious signs of the times. I cannot doubt that God designs by this means to work out great and lasting good for generations yet unborn.

2. The spirit of innovation—a restless searching after something new, forms another of the leading features of the times: and it is one from which I know not whether we have more to fear or hope. It is obvious that without innovation there can be no improvement;—but then it should be considered that changes may be effected in the sentiments and habits of the community, from

which much more of evil than good will result.

Nor can it be doubted that such is the character of *some* of the changes, that are passing before the eyes of the men of this generation. I fear we have lost much of that deep religious feeling, that ardent and earnest piety, which once pervaded this community, and for which no refinement of manners, no attainments in literature and no mere human accomplishments, can with safety be substituted. I fear, that there has been a great and lamentable falling off in family government and family religion, and that with all the show and noise and stir that characterize the religious movements of the age, the flame of devotion often burns but dimly on the domestic altar, and that the excellent direction of the apostle, to let *piety be shown first at home*, is sadly disregarded by many zealous religionists.

It is not to be concealed, moreover, that the love of novelty may lead men to embrace specious error and sentiments of a bad and dangerous tendency. And it seems to me, that there is special need of caution lest the rest-

less desire of change which pervades the community should give birth to rash experiments in legislation and morals, which might lead to the most disastrous consequences.

But there is much to encourage as well as to dishearten in the features of the times, to which I have just adverted. And, we shall find, on further inquiry, that the degeneracy has been partial and confined within comparatively narrow limits, and that the cause of human improvement has, for the most part, been steadily gaining ground among the descendants of the pilgrims.

I shall have occasion to advert to this topic under another head, and will now merely say that there is abundant evidence of the cheering fact, that just and enlightened views of Christian truth are fast gaining ground and now prevail to a much greater extent than they have done, at any former period subsequent to the age of the Apostles. The changes alluded to have not been confined to one or a few of the numerous sects into which the Christian Church is divided. While the old *name* is retained, in many instances, scarce-

ly anything but the name remains; and what is most encouraging to the friends of liberal Christianity, these changes appear in almost every instance gradual approximations to the truth as it is held and understood by them. I know there is a strange reluctance in some of our brethren to admit that their own views differ materially from those of the pilgrim fathers of New England. But let them be placed side by side and compared the one set with the other, and the wide diversity would be apparent on the slightest inspection, and I think that few would hesitate to admit, that the advantage was altogether in favor of the theories and opinions that now prevail.

This fact, taken in connexion with many others, encourages the hope that the time is not distant, when candid and conscientious men of different denominations will meet on common ground, and own and love each other as brethren. And I firmly believe, that if half the pains were taken to unite, that have been taken to divide and alienate Christians, harmony would soon be restored to our Churches, and the disciples of our com-

mon Lord, though they might choose to retain their distinctive names and modes of worship, would keep the unity of the spirit, in the bond of peace.

3. An impatience of restraint—a disposition to escape from the control of others—forms another of the leading characteristics of the present age.

It is exhibited in a great variety of forms, and while at one time it may be identified with the love of liberty and the hatred of tyranny, at another it degenerates into a reckless licentiousness, that sets at defiance the laws of God and man.

The love of liberty, in itself most worthy to be honored and cherished, has with us through the influence of our free institutions grown into a passion, and unless carefully watched and seasonably checked, there is much cause to fear that it will subvert parental and civil authority, and introduce anarchy, confusion and every evil work.

I beg not to be misunderstood. I do not stand here as the advocate of a blind and passive subserviency to the will and arbitra-

tion of men, of like passions and infirmities with ourselves. Nor would I inculcate the sentiment that it is better to govern, either in the family, the school, or in the high places of church or state, by the application of physical force and an appeal to the lowest passions of our nature, than by motives addressed to the understanding and the heart.

The spirit of liberty—let it *not* be decried; for it is the handmaid of science and the nurse of every virtue. It has redeemed us from the bondage of a foreign oppression. It has led many to throw off the shackles imposed by human authority on freedom of thought, and given a mighty impulse to the human mind in its researches after truth. And we look to it with confidence as the instrument of greater good then it has yet wrought out. The human mind freed from restraint acts with new vigor and achieves greater conquests. Let the spirit of liberty be cherished and sustained, and it must undermine the strong holds of error and effectually counteract the spirit of intolerance

and persecution that else might reduce us to mental servitude.

But the spirit of the age is the spirit of liberty. I am not therefore disheartened, although I am grieved at the extent, to which an exclusive and an intolerent spirit is carried at the present day; for I see arrayed against it a power mightier than itself to which it will be compelled to yield. This is not the age for human authority to bear sway, and for aspiring men to lord it over God's heritage. The spirit of liberty is too widely diffused, and the people are too enlightened to allow an ecclesiastical tyranny or any other tyranny to entrench itself in this land of the free.

I lament as much as any one can do the unhappy divisions and disgraceful contentions, which prevail so extensively in the religious community. I view them with deep sorrow and hearty detestation, and I would, on all proper occasions, lift up my voice against them and beseech my brethren if there be any among them obnoxious to the charge of being the instigators of strife, that

they cherish a better spirit and study the things, which make for peace and things whereby one may edify another. It is a sad spectacle, which you may witness wherever you go, when the professed followers of the Prince of Peace set themselves in battle array, meet with averted looks, and with the zeal of partizans, and often in a spirit of wrath and hatred, struggle for the superiority.

I mourn over the ravages which an unhallowed party spirit has already effected in the once peaceful and united villages of New England. And when I see this spirit still raging in all its virulence, and hear on every side the sounds of war—of acrimonious, exterminating, uncompromising war, I am ready to adopt the language of the prophet and to exclaim with a feeling bordering on impatience, 'O my Lord, what shall be the end of these things?'

But who can so interpret the signs of the times as to believe that the cause of religious liberty is destined to be defeated? No; that cause is safe, unless its professed friends are false to their trust. If it be lost,

it will be, not on account of the opposition arrayed against it, but by reason of the negligence and folly of those who claim to be its warm admirers and zealous advocates. The danger to be apprehended, unless I altogether mistake the character of the age, lies in another quarter. It is, that men will break loose from all restraint and that liberty will degenerate into laxity of principle and licentiousness of practice. Would to God that there, were less cause for fear on this ground than obvious facts constrain us to believe that there is. Would to God that we had no worse enemy to contend against than bigotry, intolerance and uncharitableness. In respect to many the fear is, not that they will retain too much of the faith and the spirit of former ages but that they will retain too little; that they will give up what is essential, and make shipwreck of faith and a good conscience.

Little will it avail us, my brethren, that we stand fast in the liberty wherewith Christ has made us free, if we use that liberty as an occasion to the flesh. Little will it avail

us that we are not obnoxious to the charge of excluding our brethren, if by our own voluntary act we exclude ourselves; that we do not shut others out of the kingdom of heaven, if we do not ourselves enter in. Little will it avail us, that we avoid the extreme of rigor, if we fall into the opposite extreme of laxity. It cannot be doubted, that the tendency of the age is to the latter and not to the former; and I do not hesitate to express my deep conviction, that if, in the course of events, moral desolation is to come up upon our borders and to spread itself over the pleasant land which God gave to our fathers, it will arise from a spirit of insubordination and misrule, and from the prevalence of vice and irreligion rather than from bigotry, priestcraft, or any form of ecclesiastical tyranny. In this enlightened and liberal age, we have little to fear from the latter, while every thing should lead us to guard against the former with the utmost vigilance.

Bitter and acrimonious, therefore, as the spirit may be which has exhibited itself in

the theological controversies of the day, and mournful as are the desolations it has wrought, I do not regard this as the evil most to be dreaded. In the nature of things it cannot last long. This spirit must evaporate and pass away, and a gentler spirit will take its place. The storm and the tempest will be succeeded by the calm and the sunshine, and Christians who now eye each other with jealousy and suspicion and fear, will learn to respect one another, and to forbear one another in love.

There is one other feature of the times, to which I would solicit your attention for a few moments. It is the spirit of benevolent enterprise, for which the age is so honorably distinguished. I look upon the growing prevalence of this spirit with joyful hope. I regard it as one of the most auspicious signs of the times. Never before has it been so widely diffused. Never before was it so enlightened and liberal, and so wisely directed. Never before were the benevolent efforts of individuals so concentrated and brought to bear so directly and so

powerfully upon the cause of human improvement and happiness as now. And it is the very spirit of the gospel—the spirit that Jesus breathed, and which he taught us to regard as an essential trait in the Christian character. It is animating and delightful to think how many individuals of both sexes and in every grade of society have borne a part in the benevolent enterprises of the day; how many have interested themselves in the cause of missions, of the abolition of the slave trade, of the emancipation and colonization of slaves, of the circulation of the Scriptures, of the instruction of the ignorant, and the reformation of delinquents of every age and description. There is no form of human wretchedness for which relief has not been provided or sought. The cry of distress from whatever quarter is not raised in vain. Many are ready to turn aside from the paths of business or of pleasure, to bind up the broken wounds, to pour in oil and wine, and to provide the house of refuge and refreshment for the sons and daughters of disappointment and sorrow.—

And I do not envy the man who can see nothing in all this but the influence of a sectarian spirit or of a refined species of selfishness. Whatever may be the views of ambitious leaders, or of narrow minded men, such as are found in the ranks of every party, I cannot doubt that a vast majority of those from whom contributions are levied for the support of the religious charities of the day, are actuated by pure motives, by sympathy for the distressed, and disinterested love to their neighbor. They may sometimes be deceived, and often disappointed in the result. The funds which have been collected may not always have been judiciously appropriated, and in some instances they may have been wasted and lost. But the sympathies and kind feelings that were excited are not lost; and they who have contributed of their penury or their abundance, in the exercise of a benevolent spirit, have *not* lost, *cannot* lose their reward.

But who that takes a survey of the world can doubt that a vast amount of good has been effected by the benevolent exertions

of Christians, since the commencement of the 14th century? Is it nothing that the traffic in slaves has come to be regarded as infamous and is punished as felony? Is it nothing that the Bible has been translated into all the known languages of the world, and millions of copies distributed in every quarter of the globe? And is it nothing that thousands of heathen youth are now in the course of receiving the rudiments of learning at schools supported by the free contributions of the members of more highly favored communities? Is not this the very course we should recommend for preparing the way for the introduction of Christianity? And may we not hope that the next generation is destined to witness triumphs of the gospel in heathen lands more signal and glorious than have occurred since the apostolic age?

Again, have we no cause for exultation and encouragement and hope in what has very recently been effected towards a reformation of morals? Is it nothing, that, not in a few obscure villages only, but through the

wide extent of our land, a reformation is advancing with unexampled rapidity in relation to a habit that had been gaining strength for years, and that had been regarded by wise and considerate men as an evil that scarcely admitted of a cure? Is it not one of the most remarkable phenomena of the age, that tens and hundreds of thousands, without any compulsion—of their own free will, should unite their efforts to stem the torrent which threatened to bear down every thing before it; that they should not only deny themselves the accustomed indulgence; but, by removing the temptation and the cause of the evil out of the way, provide most effectually for the permanency of a reform? Is it nothing, that the reformation alluded to is now advancing with accelerated rapidity through this and foreign lands, carrying with it order, competence, private virtues and domestic happiness? God grant that it may go on without interruption, till it shall have reached every village and every hamlet in our borders, and till the formidable evil which has made so many houses deso-

late and so many hearts disconsolate, shall be utterly extirpated from the face of the earth.

Let him who is tempted to despair of the destinies of the human race, then, take courage. Let him look on the bright side of human affairs. And when we consider what has already been accomplished, we must be in a desponding mood indeed if we do not anticipate a brighter day than has yet dawned on this dark world.

Let us not, my brethren, be willing to remain as idle spectators of the beneficent deeds of others. Let us not stand still; while others are joyfully and confidently pressing forward in the race. Let us aspire to the true glory which springs from deeds of benevolence and mercy, and labor each in his appropriate sphere, to advance the cause of pure religion and good morals.

The time has been when the society, which I have been invited to address this afternoon labored faithfully and efficiently in this good cause. It once enjoyed the patronage of gifted minds and warm hearts, and

received a respectable share of the public attention and favor. When we look back on the earlier part of its history, we think we have just cause for exultation in the good it has been instrumental in accomplishing. It has sent forth from time to time valuable treatises, original and selected, on practical religion, suited to the wants of the community. The ten volumes issued under the auspices of this Society, under the title of the Christian Monitor, with the series of Moral Tracts that subsequently appeared, possess much merit and are indeed among the best of the kind that have been given to the public in our country. They have done something for the diffusion of sound and enlightened views of God and our duty, and for the advancement of piety and charity.

And allow me so say there is a loud call for more books and tracts of the same description. In some regions the call may be louder still for doctrinal and controversial writings. And let the call be promptly answered and a supply furnished. But there

are others, who do not care to meddle with the thorny points of controversy, and who want a supply of writings of a serious and devotional character, such as are suited to make them, not more learned theologians, but more humble and devout Christians. They ask for bread—food for the soul, what will strengthen them in their resolutions of holy living. Such is the nature of their demand —and I conceive that the resources of this society should, in some way, be employed for furnishing the needful supply.

YOUTH INVITED TO THE LORD'S SUPPER,

BY DR. LATHROP.

The young seem generally to imagine, that the ordinance was not intended for persons of their age. That their fathers ought to observe it, they have no doubt; but for themselves they think it is a matter of little concern. In most churches the number of communicating youths is very small. Few approach the table of their Redeemer, until they become settled in a family state: and there are many who even then neglect it. But let me tell you, my young hearers, that as soon as you are able to discern the Lord's body in the holy supper, and to understand what is meant by this service, you, as well as others, are bound to attend upon it. We find, that, in the time of the apostles, there were in the church little children, as well as young men and fathers,

You will perhaps say, 'We have not sufficient knowledge.'

Then seek knowledge. Content not yourselves with what you have attained; but endeavor to abound more and more. You have been taught that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners. Surely you should be solicitous to know, who this Saviour is—what he has done and suffered for you—and what you must do to be saved. If you have this knowledge, and with it a desire to obtain, and a resolution to seek salvation through Jesus Christ, you have such preparation as will warrant your approach to his table.

You will say, 'We are afraid we shall not live so as to honor the religion of Christ.'

Be then so much the more watchful over yourselves, prayerful to God, and diligent in your attendance on all the instituted means of piety.

Doubtless you have cause to fear, lest you dishonor your Saviour by a conversation which the gospel forbids. But is this a reason why you should not confess his name?

why you should not even resolve, or promise, or endeavor to honor him? No; it is a reason why you should be more careful what manner of persons you are.

Perhaps some will say, 'Our past conversation has not been such as becomes the gospel of Christ.'

Is this an excuse for neglecting a plain institution—an institution designed expressly for you? No: it is high time for you to repent and walk in newness of life. Let not sin reign in you, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof; but yield yourselves to Christ, as those who are alive from the dead, and your members instruments of righteousness to him.

You will say, 'We do not know that we are in a converted state.' Give diligence then to make your calling sure; and with this view, add to your faith virtue, and to virtue, knowledge. But in the mean time, neglect none of the commands of God. It is not by the neglect, but by the practice of duty, that you are to prove the reality of your conversion.

Your coming into the church, and attending on instituted ordinances, will not be your condemnation. These things are required of you; but if, under all your advantages, you continue in the love and practice of sin, *this* will be your condemnation. It is not your observance, but your misimprovement of divine institutions, which involves you in guilt.

'But we are anxious to obtain grace for our conversion: and some tell us, that, if once we venture to the Lord's table before we are converted, there is little hope that we can be converted afterwards.' My children, they tell you wrong. Paul was of a different opinion. The churches in Galatia, formed by his ministry, soon turned unto another gospel, than that which he had preached to them; and he was afraid, that he had bestowed on them labor in vain. But he travailed in birth for them again, that Christ might be formed in them. Rest not in ordinances as your security; make them not a substitute for holiness; but improve them as the means of holiness. Gospel sin-

ners will be shut out of Christ's kingdom, not because they have eaten and drunk in his presence, and heard him teach in their streets, but because they are still workers of iniquity.

If Jesus has appointed this ordinance especially for your benefit, there is a peculiar ingratitude attending your neglect of it. The Redeemer in his whole work, seems to have had a particular and distinct regard to the young. He himself became a child, that he might exhibit to children an example of early piety; and one branch of piety which he early exemplified, was an attendance on divine ordinances. At the age of twelve years we find him at the passover. He has invited the young to come to him; he has expressed his high approbation of youthful religion: never did he appear better pleased than when he met children in the temple at the passover, and heard them sing, 'Hosanna to the son of David.' He has cautioned his disciples, that they offend not his little ones, nor cast stumbling blocks in their way. He has represented them as under the guardian-

ship of angels. In the view of the general destruction of Jerusalem, the distresses, which would come on children, afflicted him with such deep sensibility, that he almost forgot his own. While he was going to the place of execution he said to the sadly sympathising women, 'Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children.' He has given it in solemn charge to the pastors of his flock, that they pay particular attention to his lambs.

What think you of all this, my children? are you not bound to come to this ordinance? an ordinance which Jesus has appointed for you, and in which he exhibits himself as dying for you—dying to purchase a salvation which you need—and need no less than others? Do you not think, that he will be pleased with your attendance at his table, as well as with the songs of the youths in his ancient temple? Do you not think, that this Saviour, who in the days of his flesh was so attentive to the young, and so delighted with early indications of piety, will accept your pious

and humble approaches to his ordinances?

There are some, who, in their tender age, have felt their minds impressed with a sense of religion, and have thought, that they soon would openly dedicate themselves to their Saviour, and come to his table. But by delay their serious thoughts and resolutions have languished and died away. Ah! I have known such instances. Are there not now among you some of this description? What think you of these early impressions? Were they not the kind invitations of your Saviour to come and take a place in his family, and eat at his table? Did he not stand at your door and knock? Was not this his call to you? 'Hear my voice and open the door, and I will come in and sup with you, and you shall sup with me?' What a pity that you did not attend? What an advantage you might have gained by complying with his first call! Accept his invitation now. It is not yet too late. Hear his voice while it is called today. It is still a day of salvation.

How beautiful is the church in which our sons are as plants grown up in their youth,

and our daughters as corner stones, polished after the similitude of a palace! How pleasing the prospect, when we see children devoting themselves to God, taking hold of his covenant, and youths walking in his ways, and encouraging one another in his service! We then anticipate the virtue and felicity of many generations, and promise ourselves, that we shall see the good of Jerusalem all the days of our life, and that our children's children will see the church in peace.

WHAT IS MEANT BY JOINING THE CHURCH?

After all that has been said and written on the nature of that act, by which a person becomes a member of the church, great and injurious mistakes, it is believed, still prevail in the community in relation to this subject. One of the expressions by which the act is denoted would naturally lead one into error. To join the church is *to make a profession of religion*, and the church member is *a professor of religion*; that is, as the expressions will very naturally be interpreted, the person alluded to *professes to be a religious man;* the very act of joining the church implies, that, in his own estimation at least, he has already attained to Christian excellence.

It is not surprising that those persons who view the subject in this light should be reluctant to make such a profession. Nothing could be more opposed to the feelings of

a delicate mind than such arrogance and boasting. If any have so understood this act, let them be undeceived. If any have so spoken of the members of the church, let them refrain from so unjust an imputation. God forbid that we should indulge a feeling akin to that which prompted the pharisee's prayer; 'God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are,' or that would lead us to say, to one without the pale, 'Stand by thyself; come not near to me; for I am holier than thou.' No; the state of mind, which we regard as the most essential qualification for church membership is that which is denoted by these words of the apostle Paul; 'In lowliness of mind, let each esteem others better than themselves.'

Another common mistake on this subject relates to the responsibilities which are thought to be incurred by the act of joining the church. That act is viewed by many as the assumption of new obligation; so that the church member is bound to a life of stricter moral integrity and purity than other men. This opinion we conceive to be false and

injurious. The laws of Jehovah are binding, independent of the will of man. In other words, the obligation to obey results from the divine will and command, and not from human choice and consent. We do not, therefore, assume any new responsibilities, when we become members of the church. A Christian profession does not in the least alter the nature of right and wrong in character and conduct. Stealing is theft, and cheating fraud, and killing is murder, and every kind and degree of sin, every form of transgression is hateful to God, whether committed before or after the act of joining the church. And so soon as a person becomes capable of moral choice and action, and so long as he shall continue a moral agent, he is required to conform in all things to the requirements of the divine law; and for every intentional violation of it he is obnoxious to punishment, whether he have entered into a formal engagement or not. Every one who reflects at all must perceive that such is the fact. It results from the very condition in which we are placed and the

relation we sustain to the Supreme Jehovah, as his creatures and subjects.

What is it, then, that we intend by the act of joining the church?

1. We reply, first, that the act is a public profession of faith in Jesus Christ. He who performs this act virtually makes this declaration: 'I believe that Jesus of Nazareth, whose history is recorded in the gospel, is the beloved Son of God in whom the Father is well pleased. I receive him as the true Messiah of whom the prophets wrote, and to whom God himself bore witness at his baptism, his transfiguration, and in various other occasions. I acknowledge him as an infallible Teacher, to whom God gave his spirit *without measure*; that God raised him from the dead; and that, having been exalted at the right hand of God, he is able to save to the utmost all who come unto God, by him; seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for us.'

It is the profession of this belief that constitutes one a professing Christian. And it is this profession that we make when we join the church.

2. If the question be again put, *what is meant by joining the church*, we reply, that by this act a person professes his intention, resolution, determination, to obey the gospel---to make it his rule and guide. In doing this, however, he assumes no new obligations, he incurs no new responsibilities, he engages to do nothing which he was not bound to do before. He simply acknowledges the force of those obligations, and the weight of those responsibilities, which had rested upon him from the time that he became a moral agent and was furnished with the means of learning his duty.

This distinction we conceive to be an important one. The Christian professor is not bound to a life of stricter integrity or greater moral purity than other men. This were impossible, since every man is bound to abstain from all sin and to practise all righteousness; bound not by his promise but by the divine prohibition and command. But he may have lived hitherto in a great measure insensible to his religious obligations, in the neglect of important duties, in the habitual

violation of the divine commands. By making a public profession he acknowledges his obligations, he admits the binding force of the divine law, and he further declares his intention, purpose, resolution, to abstain from all immorality and wickedness, and to lead a sober, righteous, and pious life.

All this he was before bound to do. He now owns the obligation and resolves to act accordingly. He does no more than is required of every other man; he simply does his duty, and resolves to do his duty. And this is what the Lord our God requires of all whom he has furnished with the means of religious knowledge.

To make a profession of religion is not therefore to profess to *be* religious, but solemnly to declare that it is our desire and purpose, and that it shall be our aim and endeavor, to *become* religious. The act has reference, not so much to what we have been, or now are, as to what we truly desire and firmly resolve, with the blessing of Heaven on our endeavors, to become hereafter. It supposes no definite amount of goodness already attained, but only a disposition

to seek after the highest degree of goodness —to aim at Christian perfection. It is an admission into the school of Christ, either to an advanced standing or into the lowest class of disciples, as the case may be; not, as it is sometimes viewed, a certificate of proficiency in Christian attainments; much less as a diploma, certifying that we have already attained and are now perfect men in Christ Jesus. We put forth no pretensions to superiority over our brethren out of the church; nor propose ourselves as models for the imitation of others, nor ask men to look at us and learn what religion is by what we are. But we do profess to be the disciples of Jesus, to have entered his school, and to be learning of him who is meek and lowly in heart. We profess our willingness to be known as believers in the truth and divinity of the Christian faith. And we are not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, regarding it, as we do, as the wisdom of God and the power of God to salvation, unto every one that believeth. We join the church because we believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and feel it a duty *to confess him before men*, in some less

equivocal way than by barely attending on public worship aiding in its support. We join the church, because we desire to join in the communion of the Lord's Supper, to which according to common usage in our churches, that act is introductory and preparatory. We profess to love our Saviour. We know the costly sacrifice he made on our behalf, and we would do what we may to evince our gratitude. We desire to meet around his table and partake of the memorials of his disinterested, his unparalleled love. We hope, in this way, to revive the image of his excellence and to experience an increase of our faith and an enlargement of our charity. We trust that our communions will prove seasons of refreshment to our souls, and the means of our spiritual improvement. In this hope and trust we make a public declaration of our faith in Christ; and, taking up our cross, we are ready to follow him—the meek and lowly one—through evil report and good report, looking to the Author of all good influence, to strengthen us in all our infirmities and to help us to walk worthily of our high calling in Christ Jesus, our Lord.

THE ADVANTAGES OF RELIGIOUS RESOLUTIONS AND VOWS.

It is a good thing for a being, so frail as man, to bind himself to his duty by religious resolutions and vows. He needs the support which they will give him in his Christian course. Many occasions will arise on which the remembrance of the pledge he has given, of the engagement he has entered into, will come as a ministering angel to succor him in temptation and to disarm the tempter of his power. Or should he be overcome by a sudden assault and yield to the seductions of sin, the probability of his ultimate recovery will be greater in consequence of the strength he derives from the resolution he has taken and the promise he has made. The resolution may have been suddenly formed and the promise rashly made under the impulse of fear or love, or

some other emotion, and yet they may prove in many instances salutary restraints upon our evil propensities, and may do much to keep us from falling, or to raise us when we are fallen. Who can doubt that the warm hearted Apostle, who with a generous ardor, declared his determination at all hazards to adhere to his master and then weakly denied him, was aided in his recovery by the remembrance of his broken promise, and the anguish it occasioned? And there can be no doubt that such is the experience of many. Under the influence of some strong excitement they purpose and resolve to break off from some pernicious habit, or to practise some neglected duty—perhaps to make an entire consecration of themselves to God. They give a solemn pledge, they make a covenant with their own hearts. The pledge is given, the covenant is made in the presence of Him who searcheth the heart. The vow is registered in heaven, it cannot be recalled. Still it may have been a rash vow, made without reflection and without a proper sense of their weakness

and dependance. They go forth into the world. Temptations suddenly and insidiously come upon them, and they yield. They forget for a time to redeem their pledge —to pay to God their vows. But they cannot long remain at rest. They remember their vows. Their bosoms are filled with anguish and remorse. They repent. They reform. With greater deliberation, and a deeper sense of their dependance, and a firmer reliance on Almighty aid, they renew the act of self-consecration, and become decided and consistent Christians. And it is the remembrance of their solemn engagements, that, more than any other consideration, conduces to their recovery.

The case supposed is one in which a promise or resolution is made without deliberation, under the impulse of some strong emotion. But it is not such promises and resolutions that it is our purpose to recommend. We would earnestly recommend deliberation, caution, forethought, whenever any important step is to be taken. Let nothing be done rashly, precipitately, in an excited

state of the feelings. Let him who feels prompted to alter his course of life weigh well the cost, and understand fully the sacrifices he will be required to make. Let him diligently examine himself, and discover his weakness and his strength. Let him consider what he will gain and what he must lose by the step he proposes to take. Having thus prepared the way, let him take his stand, and resolve, and do with all his might that, which, after due deliberation, he believes ought to be done. Let him gird himself for the contest, and then enter the field. Let him ask wisdom from the Father of lights, and strength from Him, who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ, and then his confidence may be strong. Then he need not fear to pledge his word—to bind himself by religious vows. Such has been the practice of wise and good men in every age; and they have found it conducive to their safety and improvement. The remembered vow has proved the means of deliverance to many in seasons of peril. It has strengthened the feeble minded. It

has infused moral courage into those, who else might have yielded to despondency or fallen into fatal snares.

A religious vow, or an engagement to live a religious life, may be made in secret; or by a public profession and avowal; and, in either case, may be attended with important benefits.

The practice may be recommended, which is believed to be common with all considerate and prudent persons, of strengthening and confirming good principles and virtuous purposes by *private* resolutions and vows. Could the diaries of religious experience be consulted, resolutions and vows of this nature, would be found recorded on many a page; and there are few Christians probably who have not been essentially aided by them in the formation of the religious character. Nor are their benefits confined to religious persons. They may be employed with equal success for secular purposes. Thus one man, aware of his constitutional propensity to idleness, requires of himself, by the obligations of a solemn promise, a

certain amount of labor in a given portion of time. Another, who is addicted to habits of waste and extravagance, resolves that, unless prevented by extraordinary emergencies, he will save a certain definite portion of his income. A third, having by habits of intemperance and dissoluteness, been brought to the very verge of ruin; or having by imprudence sustained serious injury in his health, reputation or property; or having become distrustful of his moral strength by reason of his frequent failures, and by witnessing the melancholy fate of others, is induced to take his stand and to bind himself by a solemn and deliberate vow to entire and perpetual abstinence.

The same means may be adopted for forming and strengthening the religious character. This man is grieved and alarmed at the view he is led to take of his past life. He is sensible that he has done little or nothing towards accomplishing the great purposes of his being; that he has been wasting his time and energies on trifles light as air, while his spiritual nature has

been almost wholly overlooked and neglected. He also takes his stand. He wavers, hesitates, delays no longer. He resolves that he will immediately enter on a religious life, and he binds himself to his duty by a formal though secret surrender of his heart to God. By this act he gives a virtual pledge, that he will devote his earnest attention to the care of his soul. It is more than a purpose, or a design. It is a promise, an engagement, a covenant. And it is binding upon him, as much so as though he had affixed his signature to a written compact in the presence of many witnesses. And, though he should never make it public, it may exert a salutary and lasting influence on his character. It may inspire him with moral courage and infuse into him moral strength, and give him the victory in his spiritual conflicts. Were it not for this, he might often hesitate, and often yield to temptation. But the well remembered vow disarms temptation of its power, and enables him to stand steadfast and immoveable.

But there are several reasons why the

vow should be made and the pledge given in public, as well as in the secret recesses of the heart. The very fact, that he has publicly declared himself, and that he is known in the character he assumes, must operate as a restraint upon his passions and render him circumspect and vigilant and faithful in the relations of life. He is bound by his promise as before; and, over and above this, he is sensible that the eyes of the world are directed to him, and that it is expected of him that he act in a manner consistent with his profession. There are very few persons wholly indifferent to the opinions of those about them; and all are aware that they cannot be respected or esteemed by sensible persons, if their conduct do not harmonize with their assumed character. The desire therefore of standing well with the public will tend to make us circumspect in our general deportment, and keep us back from many hurtful indulgences into which we might otherwise be drawn. He who has never given any pledge, or done any thing that could be construed as an en-

gagement or promise to live a religious life, may deem it of little consequence, whether he set a good or a bad example. He may console himself with the reflection, that if he should be guilty of any act of imprudence or immorality, it will not be much regarded by the world, since he has never committed himself by a public profession or any public avowal; and whatever his manner of life may be, he cannot be charged with inconsistency or hyprocrisy. Not so with him who has given a pledge before God and men, and bound himself to a devout and holy life. He feels that he is a city set on a hill that cannot be hid; that he is encompassed about by a cloud of witnesses; and that he cannot, if he would, pass along in the crowd without observation and without comment; that he cannot, if he would, do a mean or a wicked act, and have it overlooked and winked at and excused, on the ground that he neither is a religious man nor pretends to be one.

By some perhaps this consideration may be viewed as a reason why they should not

make such an avowal or give such a pledge. They may not choose to involve themselves in the obligations of religious resolutions and vows. They may regard this standing forth, as it were, before the public, as a conspicuous mark, as being a hardship and an intolerable burden. But he that is wise will view the subject in a very different light. He will be willing to take up his cross; to deny himself; to renounce a life of care and self-indulgence, for one of unremitting watchfulness and unceasing endeavors to become wiser and better. He will glory in the name of Christ, and in the restraints imposed by the assumption of that name. And he who loves ease more than safety,—a little present pleasure more than a great future good, is not worthy of the name nor entitled to the rewards, of a disciple of Jesus Christ. He is not a Christian, and let him not assume the name of one. For *except a man take up his cross and follow after me he cannot be my disciple.* The Christian must be decided in his choice. There is no happiness or peace in the mind that is

distracted by opposing interests and desires. There is no profit in the attempt to serve two masters. There is no safety in a divided heart. But there is safety and profit and peace and joy in the heart that is fixed and steadfast in its purpose; that is resolved at whatever cost to enter in at the strait gate and to pursue the narrow way that leads to everlasting life.

An appeal may be confidently made to the experience of those who have arrived at this point, in confirmation of this remark. Let them answer to the appeal, and they will not hesitate to say, that the mere coming to a decision—the very act of self-dedication—has wonderfully increased their moral strength, inspired them with a zeal and a fortitude and an energy to which they had hitherto been strangers; and produced a far happier result than they had dared to hope.

There is nothing mysterious or supernatural in this. It is all easily explained on the principles that belong to the human mind.—Resolution is strength, as irresolution is impotency itself. He that doubts

whether he shall succeed will accomplish little or nothing; while he who believes and resolves and dares, will accomplish wonders. It is so in every human enterprise. It is so in the great work of religious preparation. That man spends his time very unprofitably, and vexes himself to no good purpose, who sits and deliberates, and doubts, and fears and despairs of success; while he who girds his loins and puts on the whole armor of God and resolves to do and to dare, and believes in the efficacy of means, will achieve a glorious victory. He can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth him, believing that divine strength will be perfect in human weakness.

AN AFFECTIONATE INVITATION TO THE COMMUNION.

To every one who believes, in the Lord Jesus Christ, and whose desire and purpose, and endeavor it is to follow him in all the ways of well-doing and holy-living, the invitation may be extended—'Come thou to the communion of the Lord's Supper.'

Reader, do you believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God? that He, who created the earth and the heavens, and who ruleth over all, clothed Jesus of Nazareth with divine powers and sent him into the world, to be the messenger of his truth and mercy and the author of eternal salvation to all who obey him? And does this belief take hold of your mind, interest your affections, and excite in you a strong and ardent desire to excel in Christian attainments? In that case, you need not hesitate or delay to make a public profession of your faith and to remember your Saviour in the ordinance of his ap-

pointment. This is a privilege, to which you are entitled, and of which no man can lawfully deprive you. You may feel that you are unworthy, and so indeed you are; and so are we all. No other worthiness is required than that which consists in the sincere desire and the habitual endeavor, to obey the Gospel. If you have this desire, and if this is your endeavor, you may approach without fear the table of your Lord. For you was the ordinance instituted. On you does the duty devolve. To you is the privilege given. Could you consult the Apostle Paul or Jesus Christ himself in person, they would, it is believed, speak to you words of encouragement. They would not interpose obstacles or recommend delay. They would resolve your doubts and quiet your fears and invite you to come in humble confidence, to the holy communion, to celebrate your Saviour's love.

Come, then, thou that believest with all thy heart that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. Let thy faith be made manifest by a public avowal and a corresponding life. Let

not superstitious fears, or a weak self-distrust, or a false shame hold thee back. Wait not for higher qualifications. Come just as thou art; imperfect, yet sincere; trembling, yet hoping: faint, yet pursuing; not as having already attained, but following after; eagerly pressing forward to the mark for the prize of thy high calling in Christ Jesus. It was not for *perfect men*, but for *babes in Christ*, that ordinances and other means of grace were appointed. They will have no place in heaven. *The spirits of the just made perfect* need them not. They are designed for frail, erring, sinful beings like ourselves; and their chief, if not their only purpose is, to assist in becoming better. Breaking bread in remembrance of Christ is not so much enjoined as a duty as it is permitted as a privilege, a help and an encouragement to our virtue. Come, then, weak and imperfect as thou art; and if it is thy serious and full belief that Jesus Christ is an all-sufficient Saviour; and if it is thy deliberate purpose to consecrate thy life to the service of God, thou shalt be accepted. Let

not thy courage fail thee. It is thy Saviour calls. Hearken to his gentle and persuasive voice: 'Come unto me, all ye that are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest.' Thou art included in this generous invitation. Come thou and cast thy burden on the Lord, and he will sustain thee. Take his yoke upon thee and learn of him, and thou shalt find rest to thy soul. For his yoke is easy and his burden is light.

Hast thou lived a thoughtless and irreligious life? Still thou art invited to come. What though thou hast sinned against heaven, and in the sight of God,—despair not of mercy. Return in penitence to thy Father's house; confess before him thy unworthiness and guilt, and he will not fail to recognise and receive thee as one who was dead and is alive again, who was lost and is found.

Sinner, come; for here is found
Balm that flows for every wound;
Peace that ever shall endure;
Rest eternal, sacred, sure.

Or, is thy case like that of the young ru-

ler, who sought an interview with our Lord, and of whom it is said that *Jesus beholding him loved him*? Hast thou feared the Lord from thy youth, and maintained a character free from reproach? Then thou art not far from the kingdom of God. But why this hesitancy to supply what yet thou lackest? Why dost thou delay to dedicate thyself to the Lord, and to take thy place among his professed followers? Let it not, as in the case referred to, cause thee sadness to be told of the sacrifices which the gospel demands. Come, take up thy cross and follow thy Saviour's steps; and however arduous the way, it will conduct thee to happiness and peace. Hast thou waited many years for further light and better evidence, and is age already stealing upon thee, while thou art living in the neglect of a plain duty? Consider whether thou art not indulging an unreasonable expectation, and making thyself unhappy without cause and to no good purpose? For what hast thou gained, and what canst thou hope to gain, by delay? Is there no hazard in postponing a duty of pre-

sent obligation? Is it not the part of prudence, to work while the day lasts, and to prepare in season for the night that is coming, in which no man can work?

Art thou a parent? Behold the children which God has given thee. Wilt thou not bring them, in the faith of him who took little children in his arms and declared them to be subjects of his kingdom, and dedicate them to the Lord? Wilt thou withhold from them the ordinance, which brings them into covenant relations with the church, and which so forcibly reminds thee of thy obligation to bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord? Wait a little longer and they will have passed from under thy care, and be no longer subject to thy control. Weigh well this consideration, and let it prompt thee to an early compliance with the requisitions of the gospel.

But perhaps thou pleadest thy youth in justification of thy delay. Thou thinkest that none but the ripe in years and the strong in virtue are allowed to approach the table of communion; that it would be pre-

sumption for one so young, so inexperienced, so imperfect as thou, to apply for admission into the church. But it is not so. Young as thou art, if thou canst appreciate the character of Jesus, and feel thy need of a Saviour, thou art not too young to commemorate his death. Come, then, while thou art yet young, while thy heart is yet tender, before age shall have withered thine affections, or the cares of the world shall have occupied thy mind, consecrate thyself to the Lord. Give to God thy undivided heart. Consecrate to him the warm affections of thy youth. Enter thyself as a young disciple in the school of Christ. Sit at Jesus' feet and hearken to his words. Take thy place at the table among older, but not perhaps more worthy guests. Let the coldness and insensibility of age be warmed and enlivened by the ardor and vivacity of youth. And let young voices join with those which time has robbed of their sweetness and melody in chanting the praises of the Great Redeemer.

Whoever thou art, whatever thy age and

condition, thou art invited to the communion. Only bring with thee a humble, docile mind, a penitent, thankful, and obedient heart, and thou wilt be an accepted guest. Slight not the generous invitation. Wait not for a more convenient season. But now, while it is called today, before any unseen obstacle shall intervene, dedicate thyself to the Lord and enjoy the privileges, to which that act will entitle thee.

The Spirit and the bride say, come. And let him that heareth say, come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.

The Spirit, in our hearts,
Is whispering, 'Sinner, come;'
The bride, the church of Christ, proclaims
To all his children, 'come!'

Let him that heareth say
To all about him, 'come!'
Let him that thirsts for righteousness,
To Christ the fountain come!

Yes, whosoever will,
O let him freely come,

And freely drink the stream of life;
'Tis Jesus bids him come.

Lo! Jesus, who invites,
Declares, 'I quickly come:'
Lord, even so! I wait thine hour;
Jesus, my Saviour, come!

THE PERPETUITY OF THE LORD'S SUPPER.

The obligation to observe the ordinance of the Lord's Supper rests on the assumed fact, that it was instituted by Jesus Christ for the use of his disciples in every age. This fact, as it seems to us, rests on evidence that is wholly conclusive. It is not our purpose, however, to collect this evidence or to attempt a labored argument in proof of the perpetuity of the institution. We would barely advert to a single consideration, which, of itself, independent of all other proof, carries with it irresistible conviction to the mind. We refer to the testimony of the Apostle Paul. His testimony is given in his First Epistle to the Corinthians, chap. xi. 23—26; whch the reader is requested to examine for himself. The testimony itself is very explicit. The writer says expressly, that the account he gives of the institution of the Supper is the

same that he had *received from the Lord.* Paul, it will be recollected, was not called to the apostleship till after the resurrection and ascension of our Lord. He must have received the account referred to, therefore, by a miraculous communication. Jesus Christ did appear to him in person, as we are informed, at the time of his conversion; and, as he assures us in his Epistle to the Galatians, that he obtained his knowledge of the gospel not from men, or human instruction, but *by the revelation of Jesus Christ,* it is not improbable that he was favored with repeated interviews with our Lord, before he entered on his apostolical labors.

At one of these interviews, unquestionably, he received the account, which he gives to the Corinthians of the institution of the Lord's Supper.

Now he could not be mistaken on this point. He either had received the account from Jesus Christ or he had not. If he had not, then the Apostle asserted what was not true, and what he must have known at the time was not true. If on the contrary he

asserted only what was fact, then it is the duty of Christians to show forth their Lord's death till he come. *Till he come*—not in the descent of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost, an event already passed; nor for the destruction of the Jewish state, an event which did not particularly concern any but Jews; and as it is difficult to conceive any good reason for observing the ordinance till that period, which would not enforce its observance afterwards;—but till he come at the final consummation of all things, to judge the world and to render to every man according to his deeds; an event equally interesting at all times and to all persons.

Accordingly the ordinance is to be observed by the successive generations of men till the end of the ages, when 'all things shall be subdued to the Son, and the Son himself shall deliver up the kingdom to God, even the Father, that God may be all in all.'

APPENDIX.

The 'society for promoting Christian Knowledge, Piety and Charity,' was formed in 1805, by a number of gentlemen in Boston and the vicinity. For several successive years after its formation its publications were issued at regular intervals and obtained a pretty extensive circulation. They first appeared under the title of *The Christian Monitor*, and afterwards of *Religious Tracts*, the former comprising twenty numbers or ten duodecimo volumes; the latter twelve numbers or six volumes.

The following is a list of the publications issued by the society since its commencement.

Vol. 1. Prayers and Devotional Exercises for the use of various classes of persons, and particularly young heads of families.

Vol. 2. Eight sermons on the Means of Religion; by the late Rev. John Foster of Brighton; also nine discourses on the relative duties, by the late Rev. William Emerson of Boston.

Vol. 3. Law's Serious Call to a devout and holy life; also, Mason on Self Knowledge.

Vol. 4. Of the Truth of the Christian Religion, by David Hartley. Also, seven Sermons addressed to young persons, by the late Rev. Dr. Kendall of Weston.

Vol. 5. An Earnest Exhortation to a holy life, in a letter to a young Lady on preparation for death, by Archbishop Wake. Also, Moral and Religious Contemplations by Bishop Hall.

Vol. 6. Seven Sermons on the Education of children, by Zollikoffer and Walker. Also, Percy's Key to the New Testament.

Vol. 7. Advice from Farmer Trueman to his daughter Mary, by *the great and good Mr Hanway*, also, a selection from Dr Watt's 'Orthodoxy and Charity united.'

Vol. 8. Letters to mourners, by various authors: also Lord Lyttleton's 'Observations on the Conversion and Apostleship of St Paul.'

Vol. 9. Sermons by different authors.

Vol. 10. Short observations and reflections upon select passages of Scripture for every Sunday in the year, with appropriate hymns; also Bishop Burnet's life and death of the Earl of Rochester.

Religious tracts, in six volumes published by the same society.

Vol. 1. Discourses on various subjects.

Vol. 2. Moral tracts; also, interesting views of Christianity, by M. Bonnet.

Vol. 3. Moral tracts.

Vol. 4. Seven sermons by the late Rev. David Barnes, D.D. of Scituate, also Dr Chauncey on Breaking of Bread in the remembrance of the dying love of Christ.

Vol. 5. Orton's six Discourses on Family Worship; also, Religious Tracts.

Vol. 6. An Essay on Justification, by Dr MacKnight. History of Eleanor Williams. Also, the Christian Minister's Reasons for Baptising Infants, and for administering the ordinance by sprinkling or pouring of water, by S. Addington.